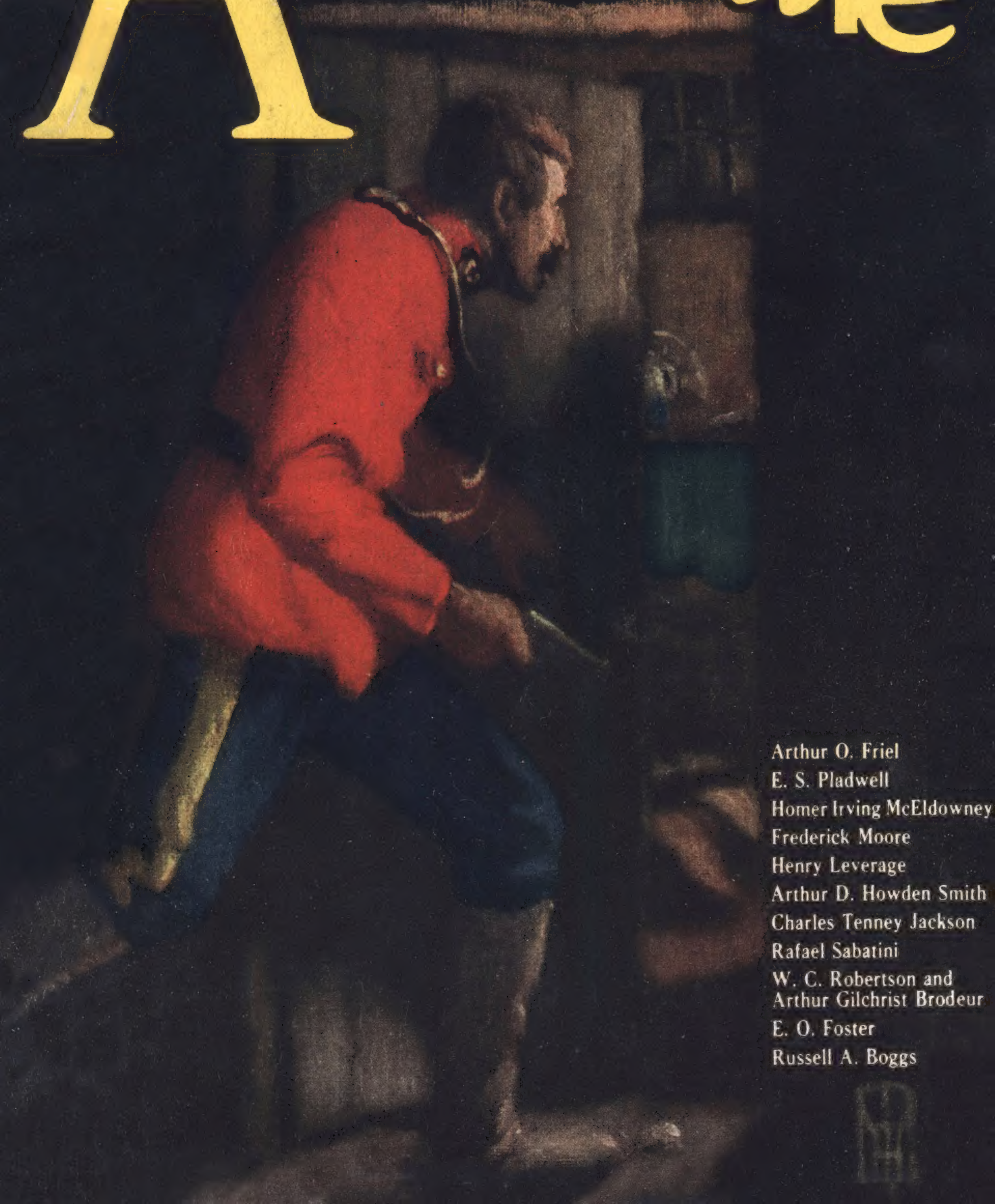
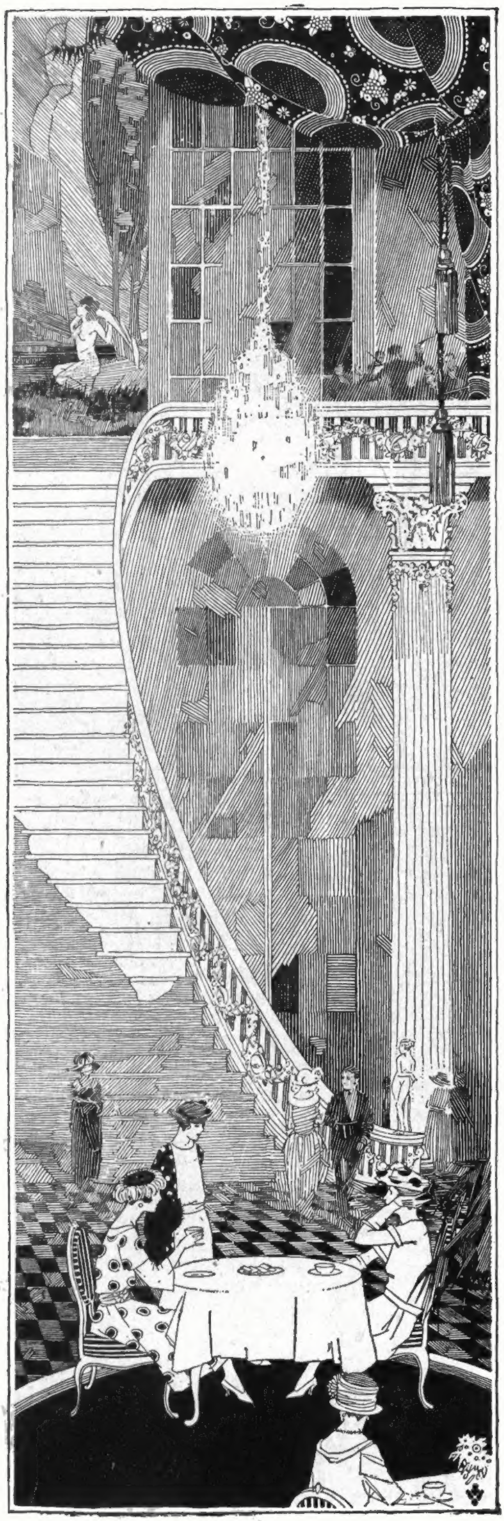
OCTOBER
10th
1921
25c

THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



Arthur O. Friel
E. S. Pladwell
Homer Irving McEldowney
Frederick Moore
Henry Leverage
Arthur D. Howden Smith
Charles Tenney Jackson
Rafael Sabatini
W. C. Robertson and
Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur
E. O. Foster
Russell A. Boggs



You can make Autumn clothes that breathe Paris

WOULDN'T it be wonderful to have all the clothes you want this Fall? To go through fashion pages and decide, luxuriously, "I'll have this" and "I'll have that," as blouse or frock or suit captivates your fancy!

But perhaps you feel that you can't afford a suit and a frock, too, or perhaps you despair of ever embodying in the clothes you make that indefinable air of smartness.

Then this Autumn with its original lines, its fascinating colors and myriad fabrics would be a tantalizing season of ungratified desires were it not for this wonderful invention that makes possible the most complete wardrobe you ever possessed—a wardrobe made by yourself, that will have all the jaunty swing of Autumn Paris.

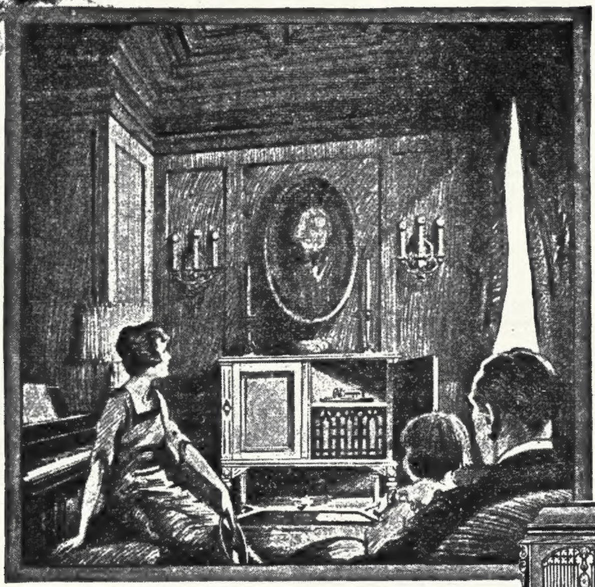
And at a saving of from 50c to $10.00 on every frock you make

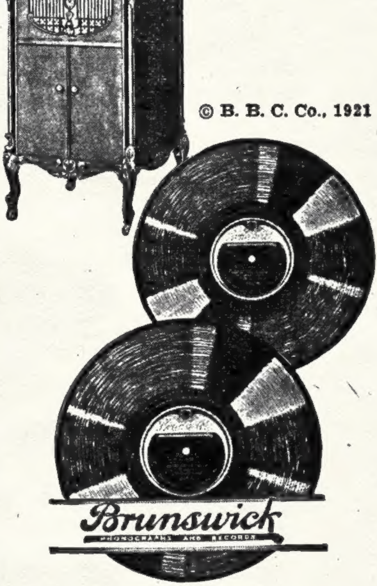
The DELTOR

With All New

BUTTERICK PATTERNS

Godowsky





Reader Note — ***This announcement of the most notable accomplishment of years in phonographic reproduction, is made with the approval of world authorities, before whom the remarkable pianoforte records mentioned below were demonstrated.***

© B. B. C. Co., 1921

True Piano Tones
at last achieved
In Phonographic Reproduction!

For years highest musical authorities said it was impossible.

That no phonographic record, no phonograph, could convey piano notes without "mechanical" suggestion — without shallowness or vibration.

Now Brunswick announces perfect rendition! Tones deep and clear—notes amazing in their fidelity.

And world authorities proclaim this the Supreme Achievement in recording and reproducing music.

Exclusive Methods the Reason

By virtue of exclusive methods of Reproduction and of Interpretation, Brunswick achieves perfect rendition of the so-called "difficult" tones — the piano, the harp, the human voice; attaining even soprano High "C" without "metallic" intrusion, "chatter" or vibration. Methods which apply to no other phonograph or records.

Hence, buying any phonograph, without at least hearing The Brunswick, is a mistake. And to be without Brunswick records is to miss much of what is *best* in music.

Ask your nearest Brunswick dealer for a demonstration. The Brunswick plays all records—and Brunswick Records can be played on any phonograph. Hear, compare —then judge for yourself.

Note: New Brunswick Records are on sale at all Brunswick dealers on 16th of each month in the East, and in Denver and the West on the 20th.

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO., CHICAGO
Manufacturers—Established 1845

BRUNSWICK
PHONOGRAPHS AND RECORDS

Hear These Super-Feature Pianoforte Records
—the most talked-about records of the day

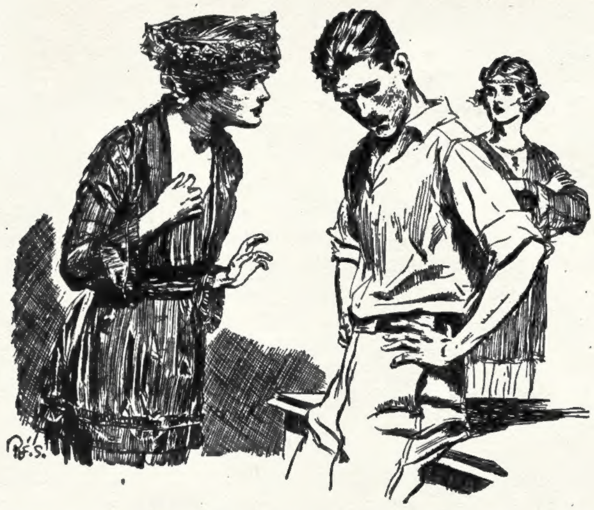
30004—Marche Militaire
(Schubert-Taussig)
concert paraphrase.
Leopold Godowsky
10027—Witches' Dance
(MacDowell)
Leopold Godowsky

Important!
The above records can be obtained in conveniently packed folders, containing the two, at any Brunswick dealer's—price $2.50. Or singly, if desired.

ADVENTURE
October 10th, 1921

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 31
Number 1



Who was the Guilty Party?

They had been engaged for months—soon they were to be married—but on a crazy wager, he had gone out with this other woman—and Lizbeth had found him out!

Angry—jealous—her heart breaking with outraged love—who was to blame for what she did then?

Women called *her* guilty—men called *him* guilty—but O. Henry—who understood women—who saw beneath the surface and found only a faint line between the angel and the sinner—O. Henry put the guilt far back in another place—

O. HENRY

All over the world, from the great cities to the remotest corners, his name is known. His stories are on the stage, in the movies, in newspapers, books and magazines. College Presidents acclaim his genius—the man on the street loves him for his humanness. He has become almost as universally known as the Bible, as oft quoted as Shakespeare—in short, his stories are now an indispensable part of the library of every well read man.

Once in many generations a man is born in whom burns the fire of heaven—the world calls such a man a genius. He flames into the world like a meteor. The heaven-given fire is his and urges him on. Of such was O. Henry. He has the vision of the seer. He sees into the hearts of men as though they were cased in glass.

He is the great teller of tales, and the power within him has given itself to the world in profusion and variety. He has given us more different kinds of wonderful stories than anyone who ever lived—there isn't a single page that is not a living, breathing entity. There is as much variety in them as in ten different authors.

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It happens that we have left over from last year's big sale a few hundred copies of the best stories of E. Phillips Oppenheim—7 splendid volumes—the cream of present-day fiction. While they last, we will give one of these 7-volume sets FREE with each set of O. Henry. When these few hundred sets are gone, you will be able to get Oppenheim's thrilling tales only at their regular price in the book stores.

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The Review of Reviews Co., 30 Irving Place, New York City

Adv. 10-10-21

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Send me on approval, charges paid by you, O. Henry's works in 12 volumes, bound in silk cloth, with gold tops. Also the 7 volume Masterpieces of E. Phillips Oppenheim, bound in cloth. If I keep the books, I will remit $1.50 in 5 days, and then $2.00 a month for 14 months for the O. Henry set only and keep the 7 volumes of E. Phillips Oppenheim FREE. Otherwise I will, within 10 days, return both sets at your expense.

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"Life Ain't in Holdin' a Good Hand, but in Playin' a Poor Hand Well"

By R.C. Templeton

LIFE AIN'T IN
HOLDIN' A GOOD
HA T IN
POOR

THERE IS NO FINER THING IN THE WORLD than courage. It is the warm and beautiful flame which lights the fires of ambition in every man's soul and burns a forward path through every difficulty.

It is easy to be courageous when the odds are in your favor. But the greater hero is the man who smiles a brave smile when days are darkest and keeps on fighting toward the ultimate goal—"to the last a warrior unafraid."

As Grantland Rice so beautifully expresses it:—

> "God grant that in the strife and stress
> Which all must face who linger here—
> Upon the Field of Hopelessness
> Or with the laurel swinging near,
> Upon the world's red firing line
> The battle of the strong and weak—
> The fate of all the Fates be mine—
> I will not show the Yellow Streak.
>
> If Fortune play me false or fair—
> If, from the shadowlands I creep
> Up to the heights and linger there,
> Or topple downward to the deep—
> On up the rugged path of fame,
> Where one man falls—another mounts;
> God grant that I play out the game,
> For there is nothing else that counts."

As the old cowboy saying goes—"Life ain't in holdin' a good hand, but in playin' a poor hand well."

What if you did have to leave school when you were but a boy! What if you have been working for years at a small salary with little or no chance for advancement! Do you think that makes any difference to a real fighter?

What you have done with your time up to now accounts for what you are Today.

What you do with your time *from now on* will decide what you will be Tomorrow.

Your hands can't earn the money you need. But your head can—*and will!*—if you give it the chance.

No matter what your age—your education—or your means, you can get out of the rut and make good in a big way if you grit your teeth and say "I will."

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The I. C. S. is the biggest and oldest correspondence school in the world. For thirty years, it has been helping men out of routine drudgery into work they like—helping them to win advancement, to have happy, prosperous homes, to know the joy of getting ahead in business and in life.

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Here is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, mark and mail this coupon. It takes only a moment of your time, but it is the most important thing you can do today. Right now is the time to say "I will."

— — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — —

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Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

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☐ Electric Lighting & Railways
☐ Electric Wiring
☐ Telegraph Engineer
☐ Telephone Work
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Toolmaker
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ ARCHITECT
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ CHEMIST
☐ Pharmacy
☐ BUSINESS MANAGEM'T
☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ ADVERTISING
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☐ Railroad Positions
☐ ILLUSTRATING
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☐ Private Secretary
☐ Business Correspondent
☐ BOOKKEEPER
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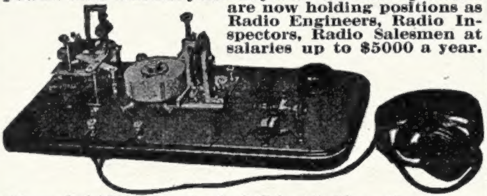

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We furnish free to all students, during the course, *the wonderful receiving and sending set exactly as produced in the illustration*. **This set is not loaned, but GIVEN to all students completing the Course.**

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To prove our blue-white MEXICAN DIAMOND closely resembles a genuine diamond with same DAZZLING RAINBOW FIRE, we will send a selected 1 carat gem in Ladies' Solitaire Ring (Cat. price $4.98) for **Half Price to introduce, $2.63,** or in Gent's Heavy Tooth Belcher Ring (Cat. price $6.26) for $3.25. Our finest 12k Gold Filled mountings. GUARANTEED 20 YEARS. **SEND NO MONEY.** Just mail postcard or this ad. State Size. We will mail at once C. O. D. If not pleased return in 2 days for money back less handling charges. Write for **Free** Catalog. **Agents Wanted.**

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(Exclusive controllers Mexican Diamonds)

He Beats Midas!

HARRY BUSHNELL
of Pennsylvania, in his spare time earns from $25 to $100 a week through magazine subscription work.

Don't YOU

envy this modern Midas who, at will, can turn his spare moments into extra dollars? Why not give a few hours of your spare time each week to do the same as he does?

What is his secret?

you may ask. It lies in Butterick subscription work. Can you look after the new and renewal subscriptions to ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER, which are continually coming to us direct in increasingly large volumes? We need additional representatives everywhere and are ready to pay liberal commissions and

a monthly salary

for conscientious, productive effort. Your earning-power depends solely on yourself and your own individual work. No experience is necessary and there is absolutely no obligation. Simply sign the coupon below and mail it NOW.

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Please send me, without obligation, all particulars concerning your practical money-making plan: also a copy of "Turning Spare Time Into Cash."

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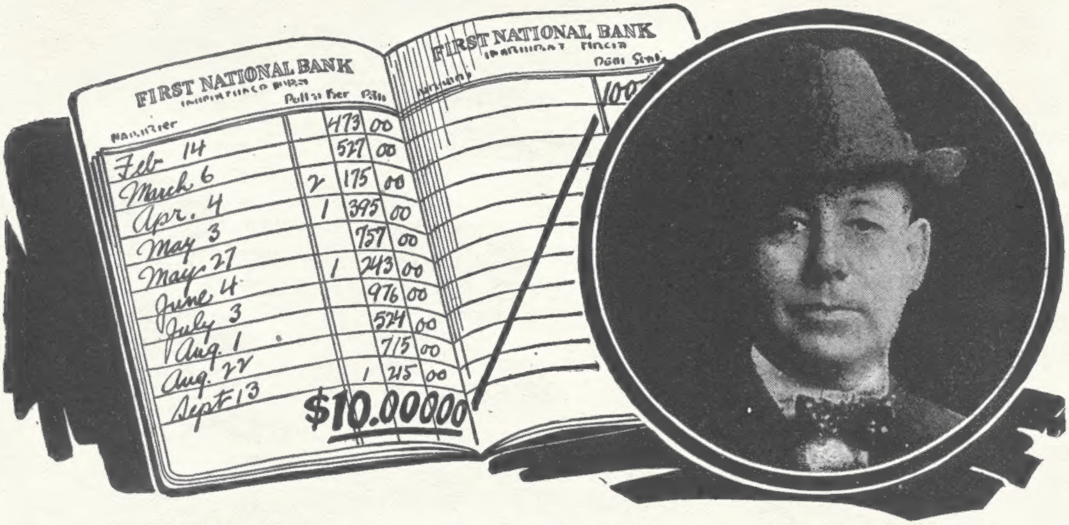

Worth $10,000 a Year and Didn't Know It

For Years Warren Hartle Worked for $18 a Week, Never Thinking He Could Make Much More. Today He is Earning $10,000 a Year! Read the Amazing Story of His Easy and Sudden Rise to Success

FOR ten years he worked in the Railway Mail Service, at pay ranging from $900 to $1,600 a year—just bare existence wages, with no opportunity to make more or save. ***And now he is earning $10,000 a year!*** Yes, Warren Hartle makes as much some months now as he formerly did in a year's hard work on the railroad.

Hartle's sudden rise to real success may sound amazing, almost unbelievable, ***yet there is not the slightest doubt that you can do exactly what he did.*** What was the secret of his sudden rise from small pay to magnificent earnings? ***It was the same secret that has brought prosperity to thousands of others.***

There is J. P. Overstreet of Denison, Texas, for example. A short time ago he was a police officer earning less than $1,000 a year. Now he writes: "My earnings for March were over $1,000, and over $1,800 for the last six weeks, while last week my earnings were $356.00." C. W. Campbell, Greensburg, Pa., was formerly a railroad employee on a small salary. In one month his earnings were $1,562. Then there is Charles L. Berry of Winterset, Iowa, who quit his job as a farmhand and earned $2,140 in one month!

WHY DON'T YOU GET INTO THE BIG MONEY FIELD?

Mr. Hartle, Mr. Overstreet, Mr. Campbell and Mr. Berry are all successful Salesmen. They realized their ambition by landing $10,000 jobs in an amazingly simple way, with the help and guidance of the National Salesmen's Training Association. Some time—somewhere back in the past, each one of them read of this remarkable course of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service, just as you are reading of it today. Each one of them was dissatisfied with his earning capacity as perhaps you are—and each one cast his lot with the N. S. T. A. Today they are important factors in the business world—enjoying all the comforts and luxuries money can buy. And yet they are not exceptions, for there are thousands of N. S. T. A. Trained Salesmen who are making big money, as we will be only too glad to show you if you will mail the coupon at the right.

WE TRAIN YOU AND HELP YOU LAND A JOB

The National Salesmen's Training Association is an organization of top-notch Salesmen and sales managers formed for the express purpose of training men in the science of successful selling. You do not need to know the first thing about selling—for the N. S. T. A. trains you from the ground up—gives you a complete insight into selling methods — in your spare time—without making it necessary to give up your present position until you are ready to begin actual selling.

In addition to this remarkably efficient course of training, the N. S. T. A. maintains a Free Employment Service to help its Members to positions in the lines for which they are best suited just as soon as they are qualified and ready.

Get out of that rut. Work for yourself! Salesmanship is the biggest paid of all professions. Never before have the opportunities been greater. Investigate the great field of Selling and see what it offers you. The facts and proof you will receive will surprise you.

SEND FOR FREE BOOK ON SALESMANSHIP NOW

Just mail the coupon or write for our free illustrated Book, "A Knight of the Grip," which we will be glad to send without any obligation on your part. Let us prove to you that regardless of what you are doing now, you can quickly become a Master Salesman. Let us show you how you, too, can step into the ranks of these big money makers of business. See how easily you can learn this fascinating, big pay profession at home in your spare time. Learn what we have done for others and what we stand ready to do for you. Don't put it off a minute—mail the coupon at once.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 73-R Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn.,
Dept. 73-R, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me without any obligation on my part, your free Book, "A Knight of the Grip," and full information about the N. S. T. A. system of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service. Also a list showing lines of business with openings for salesmen.

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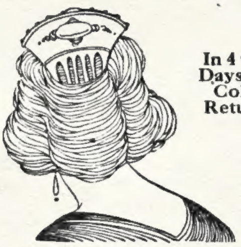
Street..

City..............................State...............


In 4 to 8 Days the Color Returns

Science Comes to the Rescue of the Gray Haired

Gray hair now is an unnecessary affliction at any age. Every silver thread can be quickly and safely restored by Mary T. Goldman's Hair Color Restorer.

This scientific preparation is a clear, colorless liquid, applied with a comb. In 4 to 8 days natural color returns. Your hair is clean soft and fluffy. There is nothing to wash or rub off.

PROVE THIS WITH TRIAL BOTTLE

Mail the coupon for a trial size bottle and application comb. Test on single lock.

When you see the beauty of this single restored lock, get a full size bottle. Buy from your druggist, or send direct to us.

Mary T. Goldman, 700 Goldman Bldg., St. Paul, Minn.

Mary T. Goldman, 700 Goldman Bldg., St. Paul, Minn.

Please send me your FREE trial bottle of Mary T. Goldman's Hair Color Restorer with special comb. I am not obligated in any way by accepting this free offer.

The natural color of my hair is black ..... jet black .....

dark brown ..... medium brown ..... light brown .....

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SPECIAL TERMS—Ten months' credit on any article selected from the SWEET catalogue. NO MONEY IN ADVANCE. Shipment made for your examination. First payment to be made only after you have convinced yourself that SWEET values cannot be equalled. If not what you wish return at our expense.

No Red Tape—No Delay

Every transaction CONFIDENTIAL. You don't do justice to yourself and your dollars unless you inspect our unusual values in Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry, Silverware, Leather Goods, etc. Send TODAY for SWEET De Luxe Catalogue. Write NOW to **Dept. 301-R.**

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Sweet's Cluster

7 Fine Diamonds set in Platinum. Looks like 1½ carat solitaire.

ONLY $3.80 A MONTH

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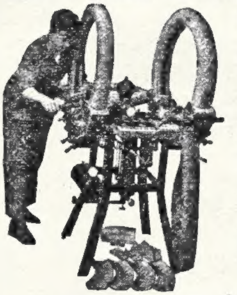
BE YOUR OWN BOSS; MAKE MORE MONEY



With little capital, you can establish a business in your home town and make $10 to $30 per day with Anderson Steam Vulcanizers. Better work, with less cost and bigger profits.

There are Anderson schools in 34 states, one is near you. Better schooling plus finest equipment makes Anderson tireologists successful.

We teach you the famous Anderson method of vulcanizing and the operation of the Anderson Super-Heated Steam Vulcanizer and Retreader.

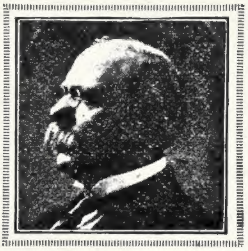
Takes 5 to 10 days in school and costs $35. If at any time you buy an Anderson Vulcanizer, we refund your $35 and pay you $5 per day for each of the 10 school days, because we sell the work you do.

We will tell you how to make more money. Write today.

ANDERSON STEAM VULCANIZER CO.

107 Williams Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind., U. S. A.

Who Is He?



He is O. W. Hendee, of Nebraska, who, in odd hours, has built up a steadily growing permanent income through magazine subscription work. And, he is only one of thousands of busy men and women who are earning all the extra dollars they need by taking care of new and renewal subscriptions for ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER—four magazines in popular demand everywhere.

Why Not—You?

YOU, too, can *monopolize* all the magazine-purchasing homes in your community and assure yourself of a steadily growing substantial income that will be limited solely by your own efforts. A practical, tried and proven means of building an independent income awaits you in the Butterick subscription plan. We are ready to teach you and cooperate with you at all times.

NO EXPERIENCE IS NECESSARY. You incur no obligation whatsoever. All necessary instructions and particulars will be mailed to you immediately on receipt of the coupon below, absolutely free of charge. It is simply necessary that you act—AT ONCE.

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Manager, Staff Agencies Division
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Dear Sir:

Please send me, without obligation, all particulars concerning your practical money-making plan; also a copy of "Turning Spare Time Into Cash."

Name ....

Street ....

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I Teach Piano a Funny Way

DR. QUINN AT HIS PIANO—From the famous sketch by Schneider, exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition

So people told me when I first started in 1891. But now after over twenty-five years of steady growth, I have far more students than were ever before taught by one man. I am able to make them players of the piano or organ in half the usual time and at quarter the usual cost.

To persons who have not previously heard of my method, this may seem a pretty bold statement. But I will gladly convince you of its accuracy by referring you to any number of my graduates in any part of the world. There isn't a State in the Union that doesn't contain many players of the piano or organ who obtained their training from me **by mail.**

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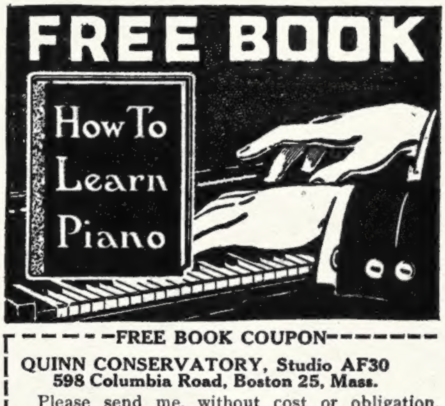

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BALTIMORE and Washington had just fallen before the British. New York State was invaded; the fate of the nation was at stake. Then came the attack at Plattsburg by land and sea. But the little American army was prepared, and so was Eleazer Williams, chief of the Secret Corps—and something else. "PLATTSBURG, 1814," a complete novelette in the next issue.

AT THE point of the cutlas, Captain Blood, outlaw of the Spanish Main, meets French and Spanish and English, ashore and afloat, in desperate fights—for spoils—for glory—and for his own lost honor. "CAPTAIN BLOOD'S DILEMMA," a complete novelette by Rafael Sabatini in our next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*— the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
Oct. 10. 1921
Vol. 31
No. 1

THE SILENT CAPTAIN

A Complete Novelette *by* E. S. Pladwell

Author of "His Word of Honor," "A Pot of Gold," etc.

HE WAS the last of his family and heir to a cattle king. He was also a tenderfoot and a total stranger. When he arrived to take charge of the great collection of buildings, barns, corrals, sheds and truck-gardens which constituted the old Wilcox ranch headquarters a delegation of hard-riding employees was present to look him over but without wild enthusiasm. They grouped in front of the porch of the old hacienda and watched him arrive. That was all there was to it.

As a spectacular entrance of a new Arizona cattle king the affair was a fizzle.

The new boss didn't look spectacular. He was just a stocky man of medium size wearing wrinkled gray city clothes and betraying a shy manner. He had a straight nose, a high forehead, a heavy jaw, a mouth that sagged downward at the corners and a pair of ruminative hazel eyes. As he clambered down from the buckboard which brought him, some of the gun-toting observers muttered.

"A runt!" grunted one with a sombrero over his eyes. "He'll last quick!"

"Less'n that," agreed Old Man Shay, official oracle of the ranch.

"Shut up!" hissed Foreman John Hastings. "He's the owner. Give him a chance."

The foreman crowded forward to the newcomer.

"I'm Hastings," he announced, extending a hand. "Mister Wilcox, I'm glad you've come."

The new owner looked quizzically at the tall, mustached Westerner, shook hands and beckoned the foreman into the ranch-house. Perhaps the new boss gaged the emptiness of his reception.

"Talkative Injun, ain't he?" remarked an observer.

The heir entered the musty, dusty old front room of the ranch house, laid his battered valise on the floor and raised the shades, throwing sunlight boldly upon the patterned blue carpet and the great leathern chairs which had been darkened since the

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days of his late uncle, Jim Wilcox, the old king of the ranges.

It was a comfortable room, filled with intimate reminders of the former occupant and portraying his character even better than the splendid oil painting of a white haired he man which hung over the mantel.

The place was a helter-skelter collection of books, arrows, oil paintings, rifles, statuary, saddlery, cut glass and six-shooters, with deerskins and animal heads galore. A business desk, a long table, an organ and priceless Indian blankets completed the furniture. The old owner had betrayed a lively interest in everything beautiful, unusual or useful.

The slow-moving heir studied the big portrait for a moment, then went to the table, sat down, and tossed a cigar over to his foreman.

"What is the trouble on the ranch?" he inquired.

Just like that. The foreman stared. This tenderfoot was touching upon a year of battle, murder and sudden death quite coolly!

"Know anything about cattle ranches?" asked the foreman.

"Nothing."

"Um. Well. You've got a big job on your hands. Things have gone to the ——."

"All right. We will bring them back."

The foreman shot an irritated glance from under bushy eyebrows.

"Mebbe you don't quite understand. She's a big outfit. She's part in the mountains, part in the foot-hills and part on the public range. Our cattle got mixed a good deal with others. There's been trouble."

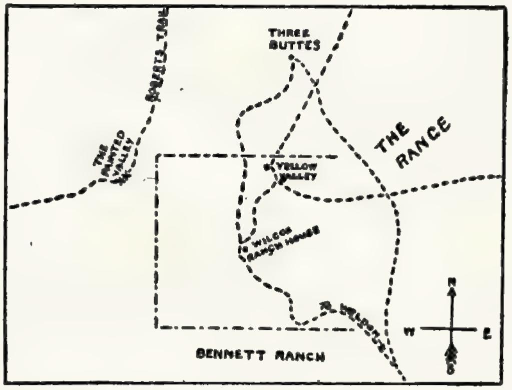
"How can you stop it?"

"You can't. Not unless you bring all your cattle into your own lands and then they'll starve to death. Arizona ain't like California or Texas, mister. We have to grab pasture wherever we find it. A lot of the country's plain desert. Consequence is, everybody feeds his cattle wherever he can, no matter how far he has to go. A man's ranch is where his cows are. See?"

HASTINGS produced a pencil and drew the three sides of a square on a piece of note paper.

"Now, here's your property. This dot in the center's the ranch house. Westward's the high mountains. Southward's the big Foot outfit, along your boundary. Northward's the Three Buttes ranch, runnin' along your line. Eastward's the range, down below in the foot-hills. Your property opens into the range."

"Where is the boundary?"



"I dunno. Nobody knows. Land titles are mixed and surveys are scarce."

The thoughtful owner smoked for a time.

"Let us look the place over," he suggested.

"Now?"

"It is only noon."

"Can you ride a hoss?"

"A little."

The foreman arose. This quiet tenderfoot was somewhat irritating in his calmness and John Hastings decided to give him all the riding he wanted. They had the whole afternoon.

But as the hours wore on the foreman marveled at the endurance of the taciturn stranger beside him. The man must have been tired and saddle-sore, but he made no sign. He just rode and smoked.

Inwardly, though, Grant Wilcox was appalled at the size of the kingdom thrust into his hands. As the miles passed he realized his incompetence. He had never set foot on a cattle ranch before. He had never controlled such vast investments as the ranch represented. He had never dealt with the type of men who lived in this country, nor faced such conditions.

Conditions were bad. The foreman emphasized it.

He told of robberies, shooting scrapes, grass fires, drought, range-feuds, cattle rustlers, nesters, bandits and every sort of obstacle he had been forced to meet. The old Wilcox herd of fifty thousand head had dwindled to a scant fifteen thousand. John Hastings admitted things had come too fast for him.

"Do the other ranches have the same trouble?" asked Wilcox.

"More or less. Mostly less. This place gets most of it."

"Why?"

"I dunno. Maybe it's because there's been no reg'lar head to it. Then again, I wasn't able to hire the men I wanted. While the San Francisco lawyers were lookin' for the heir—that's you—they kept down expenses. Didn't give me no authority and no money. They tied my hands. I had to hire cheap men."

Grant Wilcox smoked in silence for another half-mile as their ponies approached a gaunt brown butte at the end of a narrow little valley. Finally he spoke.

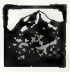
"I give you full authority. You know the cattle business. I do not. Do what is best for the ranch."

"Thanks!" The foreman set his lips in grim lines and his shoulders squared. "Now mebbe there'll be somethin' started!"

They had come to the base of the butte where their trip was to terminate. They had traveled twelve miles over hills, gullies, plains and dry-washes. To Grant Wilcox it was a jumbled landscape splashed by nature with lavish colors, exaggerated and somewhat unreal.

He passed a copper hill standing alongside a purple one. He passed the dazzling white bed of a dry lake where flame-colored rocks speckled the sand. He passed a light blue mound rising out of a yellow valley. And always the clear air seemed to his nostrils like champagne, flavored eternally with the pungent smell of greasewood.

The foreman took it as a matter of course. He belonged in this amazing land of Arizona. To the newcomer it was extravagant, but when he rode to the top of the butte, the stunning panorama dwarfed everything else.



TO THE westward great purple-brown mountains frowned down upon giant gray cliffs which in turn towered above miles of foot-hills covered with sage-brush or rocks or plain earth. To the eastward hillocks descended into the haze of a great flat prairie. So clear was the air that the mountains appeared almost on top of the foot-hills, and the foot-hills on the plains. The mountains looked a mile away. They were ten miles away.

"Over yonder's the Three Buttes," said the foreman, pointing toward three brown domes rising out of the bluish haze to the northeast. "That's George Minden's ranch. Your next-door neighbor. Over to the south'ard you can see the hills of the Big Foot ranch, your other neighbor. Back westward's the cliff country. There's a lot o' neighbors up there you don't want."

"Who?"

"Robbers and rustlers. They all sneak in here. Yonder among them granite cliffs all Arizona could hide itself. There's country up there that no man ever got into. The Injuns know somethin' about it, but they don't talk and—Whoa!"

Something moved in the sandy wastes at the base of the butte. It came around the corner of a granite ledge, walking with a queer lurch and halting every few steps to look around. Its body was long and narrow and gaunt. Its color was black and its face garishly white. Its hoofs were cloven. Its carriage and manner seemed grotesque even to the inexperienced eyes of Wilcox.

"Gosh!" muttered the foreman. "Old Misery! That means trouble!"

"How?"

"That steer gives everybody the creeps. That was the calf that started the Jarvis-Denham war. Wiped out thirty cow-punchers in two years. It's crazy. Got all shot up. They call it Old Misery. Nobody wants it around. It's bad luck!"

Grant Wilcox silently watched the animal sniff at the bare ground and amble morosely into a gully.

"The bad luck has left us," he observed.

"Yeh. Mebbe. Still, I'd ruther not have seen it. You can't get some things from your mind. I had a cousin in that fight. Shot through the heart."

Wilcox chewed on his cigar. He had nothing to say. Suddenly the tall foreman made an exclamation.

"Look over there to the northard!" he pointed. "See? Going down that bare knoll. Three men and a pack mule."

"What does that signify?"

"Some one that don't belong here. Cow-men stay near the chuck wagons. These fellers may be prospectors goin' out after supplies and then again they might not."

"Are they on the Wilcox property?"

"Sure. Everybody hits for this ranch. That's the trouble!"

"Any way to learn who they are?"

"Yeh. I'll scout around a little. You'd

better start for the ranch, Mister Wilcox. I know this country and you don't. Look. Go up that little valley about half a mile and you'll hit a trail that runs straight home. I'll show up in the mornin'."

Wilcox nodded and turned his horse obediently toward home.

He would have liked to go with the foreman but common sense told him he might be more hindrance than help. He knew he knew nothing about this country and that knowledge was his only asset.

In a few minutes he turned at the bottom of a little valley and looked back. Up on the skyline of a yellow hillside rode the foreman, a silhouette against the setting sun until his figure was lost to sight.

Two days later a wandering cow-puncher found the foreman near an old cross-trail at the base of a rocky hill. He lay with arms stretched out and knees bent, staring into the sky.

In the center of his forehead was a bullet hole.

II

THE Arizona and New Mexico cow-puncher for three decades after the Civil War was often a character interesting in books but not always safe to mix with personally.

Natural frontier conditions helped to evolve him. In the dim years before the Civil War came the pioneers—traders, trappers, explorers and gold-seekers, a hardy crew often living under the age-old law of tooth and nail, assisted by the products of geniuses named Colt and Bowie.

These pioneers were not mild citizens. They couldn't be. Competition was brutal and economic conditions savage. They were men with aggressive ambitions, appetites and passions. They brought Anglo-Saxon culture to the West, but they tinged it with their own wild, vivid, boisterous natures so that for a long time it didn't know itself.

A civilization like unto nothing in the world's history blossomed forth in the vast frontier from St. Louis to the Mexican Gulf.

But these brisk citizens, whatever their shortcomings, were upstanding men. They established a civilization and made it stick, but others soon appeared and tended to topple it over, turning freedom into chaos and tumult into deviltry.

The wild, unmoral settlements of the zestful pioneers were fine magnets to draw the wild, immoral riff-raff of the whole country. The Civil War period was their heyday.

Gamblers, card-sharps, Army deserters, bounty jumpers, guerrillas, cashiered officers, ex-convicts and such types crowded into the territory and made it bedlam. They were never in a majority but they formed a strenuous minority and conditions in spots were far from quiet even by 1890.

On February 10, 1890, Foreman John Hastings of the Wilcox ranch was killed. On February 12 his body was found, yet on February 11 his death was a topic of general discussion at Weldon, where the new transcontinental railroad had seen fit to erect a passenger station near its big cattle-stockade.

Weldon was one of the places that hadn't settled down yet.

Steve Adams, just in from Montana, first heard about the shooting in one of the town's combination saloons, dance-halls and gambling joints.

Steve was a cow-puncher with a wanderlust. He didn't have to leave Montana, but he liked to travel. He came from pioneer Nevada folks and had learned to ride herd when nine years old. He was now twenty-four. Tall, straight, supple, broad of shoulder, used to rope, saddle and gun, he possessed a leathery round face with a Cupid-bow mouth and with gray eyes twinkling amid crow-feet earned from facing sun and wind.

At present his money was getting low. His original capital was twenty-eight dollars and a horse. He had traveled hundreds of miles, working here and there. He still had the horse.

By way of getting acquainted Steve laid a dollar against the shining roulette wheel, lost, and sauntered over to the bar for a drink, which he took leisurely.

It was only mid-afternoon, but the place was filling and tobacco-smoke was already making the air hazy. Men with sombreros and spurred boots were lined along the bar, their big six-shooters swaying at their hips. Others were clomping around or gathering about the faro and roulette tables. An occasional teamster appeared in the crowd, or a miner, or a begrimed railroad man, or a blue-clad soldier from the Army post; but mostly the men wore the high-heeled boots of the cow country.

"He got it right 'tween the eyes!" came

a voice down the bar. "The bullet knocked him backward 'bout ten foot an' that was all they was to it!"

"Who was this?" asked Steve, butting in.

"Jawn Hastings. Old timer. Foreman o' Jim Wilcox's old ranch. Jest cashed in his checks. Nobody knows who got him or what for, but everybody knows jest how it was done. Funny, ain't it?"

"Sure is," said Steve.

"I hate to see Jawn go," nodded the narrator. "Jawn's lived here nigh forty year. One o' the best cattlemen in Arizona. O'course after Old Man Wilcox died the ranch was run by a lot o' danged lawyers up in 'Frisco, but that wa'n't Jawn's fault. He had to set by an' watch the place go to pieces."

"She's shore gone to pieces!" remarked another. "They call it Rustlers' Paradise. Every time a calf's born the rustlers have a race to see who gits it."

"They've got a new owner now," piped a man farther down the bar. "Came in yestiday. Jim Wilcox's nephew."

"Sho! What's he like?"

"Don't look like much. I seen him. City feller, 'bout thirty-five or forty. Walks slow, talks slow, looks like he's slow up here!" And the informant touched his forehead.

"They gotta git somethin' faster'n that to hold down that outfit! Who is he? What did he do?"

"I dunno. They say he was a railroad clerk up in 'Frisco."

"Whoop-e-e-e! A clerk! Gosh! Mama gimme a bottle! I wonder what old Jim Wilcox'd say?"

"I dunno. I hear they never met."

"Well, it's a darned good thing—Look out—Duck!"

IN THE back of the room was a quick skirling of chairs. Every one suddenly looked that way while seven silent and ominous men half-arose from a poker table and faced each other. The muscles of a hundred men tensed. The atmosphere was charged with electricity.

Something flashed. One of the seven had moved. In an instant his right hand held a six-shooter and the arms of three men across the table suddenly elevated. Then everybody stood still.

There was no shot.

The silence was broken by a stream of insult and blasphemy that crackled from the pistol-wielder's high-tension mouth and burned the three men till their faces were white; but the excitement in the place died down. Onlookers turned to other things. The talkative man at the bar shrugged.

"They said Jake Curry was cheatin'," he remarked. "That was a fool play. 'T'ain't healthy."

"Who is Jake Curry?" asked Steve.

"He's Jake Curry," informed the man, darkly. "The feller with the gun. He's got a lot o' friends around here. The less said the better. See?"

"Yes; I see."

Steve didn't need a blue-print diagram to understand.

Curry and three of his friends started out of the place, walking with the bow-legged stride of the born cowman. Curry was an ornate personality, even more than his hard-looking companions.

His leggins or "chaps" were of white angora, slightly dirty. His belt glittered with silver ornaments, his holsters were intricate with stamped leather and his enormous spurs were masterpieces of scroll-work. The blue shirt, red bandanna and stained sombrero were ordinary, but his face was not.

The face was like a tense mask. The skin was drawn over the skull with cruel tightness. The lips were thin, the jaw under-slung, the nostrils of the predatory nose seemed eternally dilated and the cold eyes of steel-blue always shifted, seeing everything, telling nothing. His face was a type sometimes seen in penitentiaries. It was powerful, cold, ruthless, relentless.

Steve Adams strolled out of the place, disillusioned.

He had noted many hard citizens in this community and common sense told him to move on. He had struck a "tough town." It didn't scare him; but why tarry while there were so many better towns?

"I guess we'll travel," he muttered as he untied his pony's hackamore. "This town ain't built right!"

He swung into the saddle and started down the street past broad dance-halls with false second-stories and with wide porches filled by loafers. He passed vehicles, saloons, gambling halls, small stores and varied other elements of a big frontier settlement, with Zuni and Apache Indians loafing around to make it picturesque.

He crossed the railroad track near the new station and traveled into the scant residential section, pitched helter-skelter on a little plain.

His eye caught a flash of color crossing his path. It was a girl with arms full of packages. She was trim, slim and neat, with a mass of golden-brown hair under a tan sombrero, and a pretty, piquant face peering from beneath the broad brim.

Some daintiness in her carriage or some quality in her face aroused the young man's interest. He stared. Apparently she didn't know he was alive after her first glance.

But fate sent an opportunity.

The girl dropped a package. Before she could turn to pick it up he set spurs to his horse, made a gallant swoop toward the package, brought his left leg gracefully to the saddle-horn and swung out to his right, upside down, extending a long arm to the ground.

He fell off.

It was sickening. It couldn't have happened again in a thousand times. He was born to the saddle and could do it with his eyes shut. Overconfidence proved his downfall. He slammed to the ground in a wide arc, plowed his face into the soft dirt and landed in an ungraceful sprawl while a peal of laughter assailed his reddening ears.

He was wild at himself. He had made himself ridiculous, which is unforgivable to the mind of a young man in front of a pretty girl. It had to be atoned at any cost, even though it took months to do it. Self-respect demanded it.

Sitting up, with one side of his face smeared with dirt, he glared at the laughing girl and spoke between set teeth.

"I'm—goin—to—stay—here—if—it—takes—all—year!" was his amazing announcement.

III

THE loss of the foreman was a paralyzing blow to Grant Wilcox. The episode shook the older hands on the ranch, but the bewildered owner felt the loss even more directly. His sole reliance was gone. He did not know which way to turn.

Evidence proved that John Hastings had come upon some one making away with a few calves. He had opened fire. The other persons had apparently returned the fire with more success. That was all there was to it. Nobody knew who the murderers were. Nobody would know until some indiscreet person gossiped and gave a clue. The men on the Wilcox ranch understood the ways of this mysterious country and didn't attempt to follow a lost trail. They waited.

For a whole day the somber heir to the ranch drifted around aimlessly, saying nothing but looking puzzled. When the body of the foreman arrived he ordered it into the front room of the hacienda, arranged for a funeral the next evening, straightened his accounts, and then immured himself in his bedroom, a silent, lonely, grim soul.

"He's wooden!" remarked "Big Noise" Tupper in the bunk-house that evening. "No heart, no feelin', nothin'! Did you see him stand over Jawn and look down for five minutes and never bat an eye? He's a dummy! That ain't the sort o' man to run this ranch!"

"Big Noise" had a wide mouth, a breezy personality and a sonorous voice. The other men always opposed him from habit.

"What'd yu expect him to do?" asked Old Man Shay, a gangling, wrinkle-faced oracle with stubby gray whiskers. "Want him to cry?"

"No; I don't expect him to act like a wooden Injun, either!"

"Mebbe not; mebbe not; still, there's some good pi'nts about a man that keeps his mouth shut after all."

Tupper swung his giant body out of the bunk-house to keep from exploding.

In an hour he came back. He stood at the door of the lamplit wooden shack and beckoned mysteriously to the others. They looked curious and finally followed.

They crossed the truck-garden like ghosts and slid around the front of the house, halting at a sign from Tupper when he stopped before a window. The shutters were pulled down and only a few tiny rays of light glimmered through the slats.

Tupper pointed to a hole in the slats. The men screwed their eyes to the window.

"Drunk!" exclaimed Old Man Shay.

The charge was true. Grant Wilcox sat by a table in his bedroom, with a whisky bottle and a small glass by his side. His face was red and bloated. His eyes were bloodshot. There was no mistaking his condition.

"And him the man that was goin' to pull the ranch outta the hole!" muttered Tupper, sadly.

Next morning Grant Wilcox might have noted a subtle change in the attitude of his men. They were all exuberant drinkers at times, but the private weakness in a boss seemed different. The men were distant and very polite. Tupper was distinctly patronizing but the quiet stranger said nothing. His eyes were clear and his face sober as he requested "Big Noise" to take a ride.

"I want to see the grazing on the range," he remarked.

"Oh, yes; shore; I'll show you everything. You better ride that pinto pony, Mister Wilcox. He's gentle an' he don't buck. Jest git on an' I'll show you more about cattle than you ever dreamed of! You foller me an' you'll go right!"

They rode twenty miles before noon, passing occasional herds of cattle and sometimes striking a tiny oasis of green trees standing out of the vast flatness of the range. Once they came to a herd guarded by very alert men. These punchers rode out from their herds and scrutinized the newcomers closely, then went about their business.

"Them's some o' Jake Curry's cows," explained Tupper.

"Where is his ranch?"

"Ranch? Where his cows graze. Curry don't need no ranch. He's enterprisin'."

"How?"

"Well, when a feller starts out with two hosses an' a six shooter an' collects fifteen hundred head in about a year, you might say he's a good business man!"

The eyes of Wilcox twinkled and he smoked without comment for another mile. Then:

"Why don't they stop that sort of thing?"

Tupper looked down upon his companion pityingly. Tupper rode a very large horse and towered above the other.

"Huh! The graveyards is full o' them that's tried to stop it! I reckon you don't savvy things around here, Mister Wilcox. This here's a big country. She's loose. She's wild. She ain't easy to hold down. It'd take you a long time to learn her ways. You never mind worryin' about these sort o' things, Mister Wilcox. The boys'll take care o' them for you. You better jest set back an' take things easy."

WILCOX said nothing. The sonorous voice of Tupper ran along insistently.

"Yessir; if I owned this shebang like you do I'd set on my front porch with plenty of seegars an' a bottle o' good whisky an' let things slide. 'T'ain't no use to mix into the rumpuses on the range. It don't git you nowhere. You might as well take things easy!"

As the clanging voice of Tupper rambled along Wilcox gathered that only four of his men were holdovers from his uncle. These were Tupper, Shay, the cook and the teamster. As candidates for the position of the late foreman they were impossible.

"Where did the other men come from?" asked Wilcox.

" 'Most any place. They drifted in."

"What are their records?"

"Records? Say, Mister Wilcox, if you git to worryin' about the records o' them that's drifted into this country you'll git gray——"

"Answer me!"

The snap in the voice made Tupper jump. He stared in surprize.

"Oh, well, if you've gotta know it, I reckon most all the men on your ranch belong to the rustlers!"

For a mile further the lord of the Wilcox herds looked thoughtfully ahead from under the brim of his old black hat; then he turned his head slowly to Tupper.

"Just why do they all pick on my ranch?"

"I dunno. Nobody knows. Guess mebbe she's easy to pick on."

There was another long silence which lasted until they approached a great herd of cattle grazing along both banks of a tiny stream bordered by cottonwood trees.

It was the main Wilcox herd, a slow-moving mass of horned beasts crowding acres of pasture-land toward the horizon with their brown, red, white and black bodies.

The tossing horns, the noise, the reek, the dust and the hoof-pounding of this vast horde of powerful bodies created an atmosphere that Grant Wilcox had never dreamed of. He gained a tiny inkling of the size of his new business and would have liked to study his herd longer except for the insistent talk, talk, talk of Tupper, whose amiable bellow never seemed to cease.

Tupper conducted the owner around like a head waiter. He practically tucked Grant Wilcox under his wing and hauled the man about.

He rode into the grazing herd and pointed out breeds and brands. He roped a bawling calf and showed how to throw it. He led the way to a little camp under the cottonwood-trees and chattered about the cook-wagon while gulping a lunch. He told how to breed and sell beef. He told when and where to sell it. He told how to ride herd and how to stop stampedes. He explained the danger of grass-fires. He tied knots. He demonstrated the uses of a six-shooter. He was tutor, guardian and chaperon.

Various men rode up and grinned when Tupper introduced them to the new owner. Some were Wilcox' men, but most of them belonged to other outfits. They were pleasant enough but not talkative.

The new owner soon observed that the range offered unlimited chances for trouble. Cattle with various brands were all over the place, some even mingling with his. The men, too, were good material for strife. They were hard-faced, swaggering, independent, terse and business-like, carrying heavy forty-fives at their hips and riding with a great jingle of accouterments and spurs. Wilcox was inclined to believe Tupper's statement about them.

A stranger arrived on a buckskin pony and stopped at the chuck wagon for a bite. He was a tall, pleasant, sandy-mustached man wearing overalls, a soft shirt and a gray jacket. Except for the high heeled boots beneath his overall-legs he little resembled the cow-punchers.

"Mister Wilcox," introduced Tupper, "meet Mister George Minden, owner of the Three Buttes."

As they shook hands Grant Wilcox distinctly liked him. He had an intelligent face and lively brown eyes; but the man seemed puzzled and worried. His face was covered with lines.

"How do you like the cattle business?" he inquired, politely.

"I do not know yet. Just started."

"Um. Well, I doubt whether a stranger'd care for it much. Things are too onsettled right now. There's been trouble on the range. There's liable to be more of it."

Tupper's loud voice chimed in.

"You don't seem to have no trouble, Mister Minden. I reckon you been able to hold things down."

MINDEN'S forehead creased.

"Well, call it luck. She's a storm country, Mister Wilcox. I ain't advisin' you, but if I was a stranger with a cattle ranch I'd figure to sell it."

"Who would want it?"

"I dunno. Maybe if the price was right I might take a chance, but I'd have to think it over."

"No. I would not sell. I have set my shoulder to the wheel. I can not turn back. It is my only superstition. What I start I have to finish."

"No matter where it leads you?"

"No matter where."

Minden looked at him curiously.

"Well, I hope you finish all right, Mister Wilcox."

The quiet stranger bit off the end of a fresh cigar.

"I will," he nodded.

After that calm announcement Minden blinked and changed the subject. Even Tupper was silent.

Wilcox and his employee soon started for home, skirting around two or three large herds during the long ride back to the foothills.

"We'd better look into Yellow Valley," advised Tupper. "It's only a little off the trail—jest inside the northeast corner of the ranch, in them little brown hills ahead. Folks say there's a nester campin' there."

"What is a nester?"

"Feller that grabs some of your land to settle on. Mostly he's a —— forsaken, no-'count scrub from nowhere, only good for to shoot at."

They rode several miles, finally crossing a barren little pass and entering a tiny valley carpeted with dry yellow grass.

It was a desolate place, but in its center stood an old adobe house with one shattered door and a small window. In front of the house was a lone cottonwood tree. Near the tree was a well, with its aged wooden boards all battered in.

The place was occupied. A makeshift fence of rope and wire enclosed the domicile. At the rear was a rickety wagon and two bony horses. A few clothes hung on a line. Smoke curled from a rusty pipe. Some one had spaded the front yard.

As the riders approached a girl's high-pitched voice arose in alarm.

"Oh, paw!"

The door opened. A frightened, slovenly little blond thing in faded red calico poked her head out of the door. Around the corner came a tall, sandy-haired old man in tattered blue overalls. He carried a rifle. Behind him stalked a taller, thinner, slouchier youth bearing a shotgun. They halted suspiciously.

"Who be ye?" demanded the older man.

"Never mind that!" roared Tupper. "What are you doin' here? Hey?"

"What's it to you?"

"You'll darned soon find out! Who gave you the right to camp here? Hey?"

The older man with the rifle turned to the girl.

"Gennerveeve, you git inside! I reckon these folks is a-honin' for trouble!"

Gennerveeve ducked back, and the door slammed. The nesters held their weapons tensely. Grant Wilcox dismounted.

"I will go in, too," he announced, quietly. "We will see what this is all about."

Wilcox ambled inside the fence, puffing at his cigar.

The startled nester was about to protest, but this quiet man was so matter-of-fact that he disarmed suspicion. The nester eased his gun.

"All right," he muttered, uncertainly. "If folks come peaceful an' friendly I hain't no 'jections, but when people tries to stomp on me I'll stomp back!" And he cast a baleful glance at Tupper, who dismounted warily and strode after his employer.

The inside of the house was a dark, musty place with pitiful furniture and cheap household effects scattered all around. A baby in a packing-box crib whimpered in a corner.

Wilcox seated himself on a rickety chair.

"Your baby?" he asked the girl.

"Yes, sir," she whispered, ill at ease.

"I see. This young fellow is your husband."

"He's my son," corrected the older man. "She's my datter."

Wilcox looked at the poor little thing pityingly.

"You are mighty young to be a widow, girl!"

There was an embarrassed silence.

"No," blurted the father. "She hain't got no husband. She thought she had, but——"

Tupper exploded in a great laugh that shook the house.

"Haw, haw, haw, haw, haw, haw, haw!"

The father's bony hands shifted the rifle forward and a finger curled around the trigger. His watery blue eyes flared.

"I stand by my gal!" he quavered. "Them that hain't sinned can throw the fust stone. Others can't!"

There was a queer silence. Grant Wilcox leaned forward a little and studied the father's thin face. Then he slowly turned to Tupper.

"I think you had better wait outside for me," he suggested.

"No, sir!" bawled Tupper, heatedly. "I'd better stay with you! Right here's the sort o' place where you'll need somebody that knows how to deal with ——"

A thunderclap hit Tupper. Dynamic energy fairly blew from the boss's mouth.

"Go!"

THERE was a kick and a spur to the one word that hurtled the big cow-puncher through the door, out of the house and beyond the fence. He halted like a man in a trance and stared with his mouth wide open. He couldn't understand it.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he muttered.

He shifted from one foot to the other and put his hands in his pockets.

"Him!" Tupper spat on the road and glared at the house again. "The dawg-goned runt! The dawg-goned whisky-swiggin' runt! Him! Huh! He can't talk that way to me! Not to Andrew Tupper, he can't! Who does he think he is, huh? Dawg-gone him, I'll have to learn him a thing or two! I'll teach him! Huh!"

"What is the trouble?" Wilcox inquired. "Are you trespassing on my land?"

The older nester's face skewered.

"Mebbe she's yore land and mebbe she's not. Who be ye?"

"Grant Wilcox. Owner of the ranch."

"Hem. Wa-al, what of it?"

"Stop it! Drop that attitude! Tell me about yourself. Who are you? Where did you come from?"

The nester looked at his guest craftily, trying to size him up. Finally the cautious squatter put down his gun.

"Hem. Mebbe you be one o' them fellers with a lick o' sense. I've heern tell about sech folks, but I hain't met none yet so I've got to be right keerful. I'll tell ye so ye can understand."

Then began a recital in which self-pity, pride and defiance were strangely mingled. When the nester was once warmed up he talked without reserve. It was a saga of human misery, endurance and persistence.

Jasper Tibbs came from Missouri. There

had been trouble about the girl. Some one had been hurt. Jasper, Elijah and Gennerveeve started their long, painful, despairing hegira across half a continent. Oklahoma, the Indian Territory, Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona had seen the tracks of their wagon.

Nature had been unkind and man unkinder. They had run into cloudbursts, washouts, floods, cyclones and tornadoes. They had met Indians, land-agents, bunco men, holdup-men and violent cattlemen. They had been buncoed, swindled, shot at, chased from pillar to post, trying to settle somewhere, but always finding every man's hand against them.

It was pathetic but sublime. Penniless, ignorant, befuddled, they had staggered onward in spite of everything. They didn't know where they were going. They only hoped that some day they would get there.

"Tibbs, do you really want to farm this place?" asked Wilcox.

"I'm-a honin' for it right smart!"

"How much land do you want?"

The lanky squatter pointed outside to the barren hills that bounded the little valley. His aspirations embraced about sixty acres. Wilcox nodded.

"All right. Stay here."

Tibbs seemed amazed and distrustful at this unusual good fortune. His eyes glittered with suspicion while his Adam's apple worked up and down in his scrawny neck. Wilcox saw it.

"I give you this land freely. I expect only one thing in return."

"Sho! I thought so! What is it!"

"Loyalty. If I ever have to fight for my own ranch I will expect your help."

The nester's calculating face smiled for the first time.

"Wa-al, I wa'nt aimin' to fight none, but if them's yore terms mebbe I'll meet 'em. I gits a farm and you gits me'n 'Lijah to fight for ye. Amen. When's this yere trouble a-goin' to start?"

"I do not know. Just keep me informed if you see any. Keep your eyes open."

The quiet stranger was satisfied. His act was not altogether charity. He had established a reliable outpost on the farthest corner of his far-flung domain!

Tupper was not so talkative on the way home. He was morose and surly, darting black glances at his employer, who never noticed them. Just as they reached the ranch-house Tupper spoke.

He had planned a crushed rebuke that would bring this self-contained stranger to terms. He figured that the man really needed his help vitally.

"I reckon I'd better git my time," he announced. "I'm an old hand at the cattle business. I'll prob'ly find some place where a good cowman's 'preciated."

The boss never even turned his head.

"All right," he agreed. "Go there."

IV

THE morning after the old foreman's funeral was cheerless and cloudy, with rain in the mountains. Gloom pervaded the ranch. The boss, who was growing a stubbly beard, loafed around until noon. After that Old Man Shay entertained him.

The quick departure of Tupper had aroused curiosity. Old Shay sought to study the boss and sat on the porch with him and chatted for a long time. Wilcox seemed to welcome companionship. Saying nothing, smoking continuously, he listened for four solid hours until the old frontiersman, encouraged by a good listener, had painted the vivid history of all Arizona.

He told the old romances of the Santa Fé trail. He related the sagas of Tucson and Yuma. He spoke of Apache raids from experience, dwelling on the deeds of Geronimo, Cochise and Mangas Colorado. He described the range wars. He explained the mental workings of the Arizona cowpuncher.

Gradually he worked nearer home, giving histories of various neighboring outfits and telling of the arrival of rough citizens in the district. Then he touched on the home ranch. He spoke of robbers' lairs in the hills, of feuds, disappearances, shootings, holdups and cattle-rustling.

Wilcox was puzzled by the eternal question. He voiced it at the end of the talk.

"Why do they all pick on this ranch? What is behind it all?"

"Several reasons. She's large. She's part ways in the mountains. She ain't had no boss. She's easy to git to."

"There are other ranches just as open. Some are more so. There is something behind all this. Those ruffians picked this ranch for some particular reason."

“What reason?”

“I do not know.”

“Heh. You think mebbe they’s a cornspiracy amongst these fellers. ’T’ain’t possible. They’re all out for theirselves. They don’t meet. Some of ’em hate each other. They jest happened here. Birds of a feather flock together. It jest happened.”

The boss shook his head, unconvinced.

“There is something behind it all. I smell it.” And he went inside and closed the interview.

Next day he went in a buckboard to town. His financial position worried him. for the old cattle king had left plenty of land and cattle but only a few dollars. In town Wilcox sought one Levi Fischer, a merchant who sometimes made loans. There was no bank in the vicinity.

Wilcox had fifteen hundred dollars and wanted to make sure of future pay-rolls. The money-lender made a great show of reluctance, but tried to get his claws on the ranch. Grant Wilcox went out of the door. Some canny caution from his Scotch ancestors forbade the deal. The money-lender was too covetous. Wilcox decided to fight his battle alone.

He realized his fifteen hundred dollars was small capital. He owned that George Minden was right and he ought to sell out. He saw that he had worse conditions to battle against than the average cattleman. He observed further that the cattle business in Arizona was risky. One year of drought thinned the range. Two years meant ruin. That was the history of Arizona.

Seeing all these things and admitting them, the stocky stranger from the cities clamped his jaw. He had accepted the ranch. He never turned back. It was his only superstition.

Buying a box of awful cigars at a little store, he noticed his name on the back page of the town’s newspaper on the counter. He inspected it closer:

“Cramp Wilcoz, heir to the eState of the late eaGLE Wilxox, arrived suring the week to take oWer the magagement of the grEat Triangle W ranh in the keTTle hills. He is the ne#hew of James Willbox and comes from Sna Francisco. We Wish the new raNCH oWner every su))ess and confadently looK to see his name on the growIng subscrptn list of the Weldon AdVANCE.”

Wilcox took the hint. He went to a whitewashed building with cobwebs in the windows and was soon in an office littered with papers, chairs, desks, spindles, proofs, type-racks, and tobacco-ashes.

A SPRINGY little man with a truculent sandy beard came through a rear doorway. Over his eyes was a shade. Over his middle was a dirty apron smeared with ink. Over the apron swung a cartridge belt with a six-shooter hanging pendant in a holster. He snapped out three words:—

“Subscribe or fight?”

Wilcox looked at this unusual journalist curiously.

“I don’t know. What am I supposed to say?”

“Oh. Thought you were someone that wants to lick the editor. There’s lots of ’em. I have to be careful.” The editor shoved a hand forward. “Glad to meet you. My name’s Potts. What’s yours?”

“Grant Wilcox.”

The editor pumped his hand warmly.

“Glad. Glad. Glad to meet you. Hope you’ll become one of the decent citizens among us. Town needs ’em. Worse all the time. Here!” He picked up a paper. “Read this. Shows conditions. Gives ’em both barrels. I’ve waked ’em up. Made a big stir. The criminal element’s all excited.”

“I would think you’d be nervous,” remarked Wilcox.

“No. Never. I’m in the right. ‘Thrice armed is he whose cause is just.’ I’m thrice armed. That’s me. I don’t back down for any of ’em. They know it. Used to be tough myself. Before I reformed. They called me a gun-fighter. All I want is an even break. Read the paper.”

Grant Wilcox read it:

EDITORIAL.

Our dign)ty and our $ense of sMell were insulted during the week by another lOathsOme two-legged rePtile who blew int% our office fliurishing a large siz-shooter and bawled threats of murDER and Mayhem until* our compositoR ran him out with a GUn.

We are caPible of defendIng ourself. We havE proved it to the SaTisgaftion of depraVed and BRUTal miscreants who have de$ecraTed the sanctity of our oFFFice but the oDds are becming too great, we cannot hold the foRt forevER!!!!!!!!

CITIxens, AWAke!

The ranges are infezted with viciOVs SCUM who thimk their DastarDLY carcases are aBOVe the law and immune from it. In the LAst year, dePRAYved charact&rs have held their Sneering swaY. vice, corIption, theivery and muRder are Ram pant. Degraded SCOUN/rels walk our streets pArAdING their EfRONTERY on eVery sidewalk, JAPIng and jeeering at the Law before WOhitch their PolTroon heartx would COWEr in $linking submission if the becent, law abid&ng ciTizens were aWake!

Ye Edit(r is not afrai6d of them. The BULLETS of VirtUe are as DEDLY as the bullets of vICE. We have met violence with V*olance and we have fought the good fight, but wE can#not stand alone!!!!!!

Citizens, awa&*#e!

Let the DECENT element of this Twon get togeter and exTERmanate the viPer which raises its Grisly head in our mudst, holding the six-shooter in its GORy hand as the eMblem of tyrrZny and raPine!!!! Let us muzzle it, SADDle it, throw it and bRand it untill its cloven hOffs nevermor3 deFile the sacredd SOIL of our County!!! Let the KeLLeys, the Currys, the LOpezes, the BoNNErs, the Vances, and all their Despiccable ilk be BANISHED forevermoRE!!!!!!

We have done our Part! Our hearT and our pistil are CONsecrated to the cau$e of j3hstice, but we caNot fight alone. Some have come forward but We WANT More!!!!!!

Cittizens!!! Awake!!!!

It looked a little rough even for Arizona journalism in 1890.

"My type-setter's sick," apologized the editor.

"I believe it."

"I had to throw it together myself. It woke 'em up, though!"

A familiar bellow thundered in from the street. A giant form stamped through the door, shaking the floor-boards with his heavy boots.

"Bring your note-book!" roared Tupper. "Bring your pencil! Come over to the Southern Trail saloon! You'll git a piece for your paper!"

"What about?" asked the editor.

"Jed Raines! He called me a liar! Him an' me's goin' to meet! Watch my smoke! Watch me eat'm alive! I'm a peaceful gent, but when I'm 'roused I'm a screamin' wolf! I got tiger blood in my veins!"

"You've got whisky!" corrected the editor. "Here, now! Stop this nonsense! There's been shootings enough!"

"I been insulted! People can't insult me! Not Andrew Tupper they can't! You come and watch my smoke! You come —— Oh!"

TUPPER noticed Grant Wilcox for the first time. Tupper was taken aback, but Wilcox tried to set him at ease.

"Let us watch his smoke," he suggested to the editor.

The quiet boss couldn't have done a meaner trick.

The bombastic cow-puncher had really hoped the journalist would persuade him to calm down and then write a rip-snorting editorial peeling the hide off the Raines person. Now it was all off.

Tupper cast a baleful glance at Wilcox and succumbed to fate. He slapped the butt of his six-shooter.

"Yeh!" he snarled. "Watch it! Come on, all of you! The more the merrier! You better bring a spade, Mister Wilcox. Them that fools with Andrew Tupper needs it! Come on!"

They left the newspaper office and crossed the street to a great saloon and gambling-place known to fame as the Southern Trail. Loungers detected something in the poise of Tupper so they followed, seeking excitement. Soon a big crowd was milling through the entrance of the Southern Trail.

The big cow-puncher put hand to hip and halted in the doorway. The crowd spread fan-wise and took vantage points. Drinkers at the bar put down their glasses.

Up against a cold matter of possible life and death, Tupper's eyes popped and his lips trembled under his great black mustache. Still, he advanced until he came to the roulette table. A man in blue overalls stood with his back to the table. Though he was armed his glance was darting hither and yon as if seeking escape. Escape was closed so his glance finally steadied.

"That's the way a bad man starts out," remarked a man near Grant Wilcox. "Both scared, both ready to run. They'll fight because they have to. The feller that wins'll think he has to keep it up. Then some other feller'll have to shoot him. It happens that-a-way every time."

"Yeh," agreed another observer. "When a feller with a streak o' yeller wins—then look out!"

Wilcox began to glimpse his own responsibility in this affair!

"You called me a liar!" rolled Tupper's great voice, trembling with a queer cadence.

There was an ominous silence.

"Yes," shrilled his opponent. "I called you a liar!"

Both men feared what was coming and delayed it; but suddenly both six-shooters were whipped from their holsters. There was a double flash of flame and a crack of thunder. A swirl of acrid powder-smoke arose.

Then both men yelled.

Tupper lurched backward, holding his shoulder and cursing. The other leaned forward, grabbing his right hand and swearing louder. Their pistols had fallen to the floor.

Five minutes later Tupper's perforated right shoulder was being dressed in the rear of the place, with the town doctor working over him. The wound was painful but not dangerous.

Tupper was in fine feather, voicing loud opinions of his late enemy and explaining over and over again about how he had deliberately shot the man in the hand and disarmed him.

"I didn't want to kill the pore idjut," he bellowed. "I'm tender hearted, I am. When it's nec'ssary I shoot to kill, but I wouldn't kill no pore, low-down, mis'able half-wit like him! No, sir! Let'm live, says I. I keeps my real shootin' eye for them that I has to be rough with!"

A little later, when the crowd had gone, Grant Wilcox approached the wounded man. The quiet boss had decided to make amends. Things had gone far enough.

"You had better come home with me," he suggested.

Tupper looked amazed.

"Who? Me? Huh! You don't want me!"

"I will be the judge of that. We start at ten tomorrow morning."

The big cow-puncher stared into the steady eyes of the silent man from the cities. Behind that calm gaze Tupper saw something inexorable. This man "had his number." Tupper averted his glance to the ground.

"All right—boss!"

V

TUPPER was now amenable; but his previous gossip had spread unpleasant rumors, as Grant Wilcox learned while rambling around the town.

To Wilcox the place was a revelation. He had read descriptions about the wild and woolly West, but cold actuality was even more grotesque than the accounts.

He took dinner in the Red Dog restaurant. He encountered persons known to fame as Two Gun Phil, Three-finger Jake, Cold Deck Toombs, Six-shooter Ike, Hair-trigger Bill, and the like. He met citizens who had just had a brush with Indians, and learned that a sheriff's posse was running around wildly after bandits who had robbed a train.

Almost every male person swaggered about with six-shooters and jingled with spurs. The main street was vivid with amazingly colored pinto ponies and the ornate costumes of certain cattlemen, not to mention the dazzling blankets of Navajo, Apache or Zuni Indians who loafed on every porch.

To add to the picture, a troop of blue-clad cavalry swung through with clattering hoofs and jingling sabres during the afternoon on the way to the fort. The flaunting red-and-white guerdon proclaimed that the outfit was Troop E of the Second Regiment, while an abundance of yellow stripes on blue legs advertised the presence of many officers.

Wilcox gave the parade a close inspection. Suddenly he yelled.

"Jimmy! Jimmy Kane!"

A stalwart captain on a bay horse looked around, saw Wilcox and halted uncertainly while the troopers trotted past. The ranch-owner strode forward. The captain shouted.

"Grant Wilcox, by all the gods! With a beard! What in thunder are you doing here?"

"I am a rancher," explained Wilcox, as they shook hands.

"Rancher? You? Why—I thought you were in Hongkong or some place."

Wilcox was talkative enough with an old friend.

"No. I inherited a big place here. I am staying on land. Took a job in a railroad office for a while. I couldn't stand the sea any longer."

"I heard about it," nodded the officer. "The wife was—she was drowned, wasn't she?"

"Yes. More than a year ago. I never want to see a ship again."

"I don't blame you. Let's see—you are the last of the family now, aren't you?"

"Yes. Old Ed was in the Seventh with Custer. Roger went to the Point with you."

"I was with him in New Orleans when he died," reminded the captain.

"I know. Little Harry went into the

Navy. I got him in. I wish I hadn't. The *Trenton's* bones have lain on Apia beach since last October."

The officer swore softly.

"It's enough to drive a man to drink!"

"I've fought it," grunted Wilcox. "What are you doing here?"

"Getting ready to relieve the Second. I'm with the Eighteenth. We're arranging to bring four troops here. The Second goes to Utah. Fort Douglas."

"Then you'll stay here some time."

"I expect to."

"Come and see me. My ranch is seventy miles from the post. It's thirty-five miles from the post to town, and thirty-five from town to the ranch. You can make it all right. I might need your troops anyhow. There are a lot of rough citizens around here."

The captain smiled.

"We can't use Federal troops that way and you know it! Say, you quiet old schemer, what are you planning, anyhow?"

"I don't know," said Wilcox, frankly. "The idea struck me. Perhaps if the troops were more evident there might be a good effect. I am not considering my ranch alone. I am thinking of the whole district."

The captain demurred.

"No. We have to be careful about that. We can't do sheriff's work. We attend to our own knitting. I guess you're not used to conditions around here, Skipper. Perhaps things look wilder to your sailor eyes than they really are."

"I feel like a dime-novel," admitted Wilcox. "Still, I wish you were right. You are wrong. The country is getting worse." He looked up at the soldier speculatively. "You can make a practise-march any time you want," he observed, sticking to his point.

The cavalryman's lips showed a broad smile.

"Oh, yes; we can make a practise-march any time. We never fight citizens, but we can exercise our horses sometimes. Certainly."

"Thanks, captain. Come and see me."

"I will, captain. Good-by!"

Tupper's mighty bellow arose behind Wilcox.

"Captain? You? Holy smoke! I didn't know that!"

Wilcox had talked unusually long. He became terse again.

"I commanded the old *Andrina*. Three-master. Go over to the railroad station. See if anything came for the ranch."

LATER Wilcox had dinner at the Red Dog establishment, where the food was rough and manners rougher. As the quiet stranger ate amid clashing knives, sopping gravy and the crunching of healthy teeth, he discerned a thread of discourse among the many voices in the room. The speakers were at his right.

"He's a reg'lar hawg fer licker!" came a voice. "They say he plants hisself in front of a bottle an' then winds around it like a rattler swallerin' a gopher. All alone, too! I don't mind a gent that gits drunk sociable-like, but the other kind ain't decent!"

"He's no feller for this country!" came a second voice. "He's mixin' the wrong medicine! I'll bet the old Wilcox outfit don't last six months!"

"You oughta seen Jake Curry laff when he heard it!" remarked another.

"Curry's workin' near the Wilcox ranch," said the first citizen, thoughtfully. "So's Tonio Lopez. So's Charlie Vance. So's Jose Rodriguez. 'T'ain't no time to have a weak sister at the head of it!"

"Are you sure some shorthorn ain't joshin' you fellers?" inquired somebody else.

"Naw! It's all over town! He's been blind drunk half a dozen times since he came here couple-days ago. Everybody says so. They say he ain't no hand to run a ranch nohow. Don't know nothin' about cattle. City feller. Little chunky runt. No good."

"I'm sorry," said the first citizen. "She was a fine old outfit."

Grant Wilcox knew where the gossip had started. He forgave Tupper, but he was appalled at the way the story had grown, though he censured himself for making it partially true.

Nobody could ever know how utterly lonely and miserable and helpless and useless he had felt on that gloomy night when he had given way to an old appetite. The appetite was never to reappear through all the years to come. He was to cast it aside without a thought, but the damage was done. In the eyes of the town he was a worthless, incompetent sot.

Wilcox was sensitive. It was a chastened and taciturn man who loafed around town that evening, killing time till he could start for home. There was no place to go except a saloon, so he took a vacant chair near a rear wall and smoked while watching gamblers, drinkers and dancers in the great hall.

It was a Saturday night and bad weather. Wind soughed around the wooden building. All the day the barometer had been low and the sun was banished by dull clouds. It was the sort of weather that makes folks querulous. There was a tenseness in the atmosphere within the crowded dance-hall-saloon and it seemed to increase.

A leather-necked old cattleman with drooping white mustaches sat to the right of Wilcox; at whose left, beyond a couple of vacant chairs, was a young man reading a newspaper intently. The old cattleman was chewing tobacco and hitting a cuspidor ten feet away.

"Heh!" he observed to Wilcox. "This yere corngregation looks like trouble, stranger! I know the signs! They's two or three *hombres* here that's likely to bust loose any time!"

Wilcox took the cigar out of his mouth. "Who?" he asked.

"The slim feller down at the poker table with them silver dewdabs on his belt is Jake Curry. He's the wust of the lot. That big stout *hombre* with his hat on the faro table's Jim Kelly—and you'll notice the dealer ain't tellin' him to take his hat off'n the table, neither. This yere dark feller with the new overalls at the roulette outfit's Tonio Lopez. They calls him Han'some. He looks like a pitcher, but he ain't. He's a tarantula. Watch him."

Wilcox gazed at the persons mentioned. Tonio Lopez was nearest. That graceful, catlike, smiling person seemed to be the king-pin at the roulette table. Folks gave him deference.

He was a splendid looking Mexican and quite a dandy, with clean overalls, new boots, a shiny black shirt, a silk neckerchief, a spotless sombrero, a handsome scrolled six-shooter, and various pieces of small jewelry glinting all over him. His face was beautifully shaped. His olive skin would have made a girl envious. So would his straight nose, big brown eyes and shiny black hair. The only thing wrong was his expression. It was mocking, sardonic, cruel.

The man was doubling his bet at the roulette table. The solemn dealer spun the wheel, which in time slowed down and stopped. There was a tiny click as a marble rolled into its center.

"Number nineteen!" came the dealer's bored voice.

"Yow!" shouted Lopez. "I got it! I got it! *Bueno! Bueno!* Thees time I win! Yow! Hurrah! *Viva* Tonio! *Gracias, señor—Gracias!*"

Men crowded around him. Others came rushing toward the table. The triumphant Lopez pushed through the mass and jammed gold, silver and chips into his pockets. He made for the bar.

"Drink!" he yelled. "Everybody drink! Everybody! Tonio Lopez, he pays! Come! Everybody!"

There was a roar and a stampede. Citizens shoved for the bar. In five seconds the chairs around Grant Wilcox were empty except for himself and the young fellow reading the paper. The latter looked up, then went on reading. Wilcox smoked.

THERE was tumult and bantering at the bar for a minute while the bartenders labored to supply the demand. Suddenly Tonio Lopez shouldered through the crowd. He had observed the two persons who did not respond to his invitation.

"Come!" he snapped.

Grant Wilcox merely stared. After his experience that day all the cannon in the world couldn't make him take a drink again. He was through.

The younger man took the order differently.

"Wait a minute," he remonstrated, without looking up from the paper.

The swarthy Lopez jumped forward impatiently. A hundred men watched him. Wilcox never moved a muscle. The young man kept reading.

The latter's action seemed to give the greatest offense because the youngster didn't even look up. Lopez bounded up to him, grabbed him by the neck, shook him to his feet, and cuffed him alongside the ear.

Lopez then turned a backward somersault and sprawled unconscious on the floor.

With the crack of the young man's fist came a horrified gasp from the electrified men at the bar. His act was unbelievable!

He had dared to hit Tonio Lopez! A hundred men, with varying emotions, looked at the young fellow as one marked for death.

The young fellow didn't seem to know it. While Lopez was struggling to arise the young fellow took away his splendid six-shooter and found a knife in his shirt. The pistol was opened and the cartridges extracted. The knife was tossed out of the doorway.

Lopez stood up. He was too enraged for words. Breathing heavily, he glared as if to blast the young man to purgatory and beyond. The Mexican was trembling all over. He tried to speak, but he only gibbered, clawing at the air with his hands.

The old cattleman stepped forward quietly.

"I reckon you better git out, boy. Go while the goin's good!"

The young fellow looked around and then nodded. He was the center of all attention. He felt abashed and stage-struck. He was also a stranger and knew that Lopez had many friends in the crowd. To stay was foolish against such odds. He thrust the empty revolver into the Mexican's convulsive hand and disappeared through the door.

Grant Wilcox followed him. He should have gone anyhow, but he had forgotten about Lopez. He wanted to see the boy.

Wilcox overtook him some distance down the street and beckoned him into the shadow of a building. The young man turned and braced himself for anything.

"Who are you working for?" asked Wilcox.

The young man decided that the stranger meant peace.

"Nobody just now. I was dickerin' with the Red Rock outfit. Why?"

"Know anything about the cattle business?"

"I was born in it. Why?"

"You fought. You didn't talk. You didn't lose your head afterward. I want you to work for me. I am Grant Wilcox."

"Oh."

"What is your name?"

"Steve Adams. Just in from Montana."

"All right. Bring in some more from Montana."

Steve laughed, then looked thoughtfully into the quiet face of the stranger.

"I might take a chance," ruminated Steve.

"All right. My buckboard is over at the stable yonder. I leave at ten in the morning. You get out of town. Meet me on the road."

"But—"

"Keep out of trouble. You will have all the fighting you want on the ranch."

Steve obeyed orders. Next morning he came up to the buckboard as it toiled through wind and drizzle on the long road toward home. Wilcox drove and smoked. Tupper sat quietly beside him and watched the scenery. In the back of the buckboard was Tupper's blanket roll.

Steve, with all his wordly possessions on his saddle, trotted alone with the buckboard till they reached the foot-hills surrounding the home ranch. Turning on the downhill grade at last, the travelers observed Old Man Shay leave a chair on the porch and advance. He shouted when they drew close—

"Some one jest lifted three hundred head o' cattle off'n the main herd!"

VI

THAT afternoon there was an investigation about the missing cattle. Grant Wilcox sat behind the long table in the ranch-house and let Tupper and Old Man Shay volley questions at a bowlegged little chunk of a cow-puncher who braced his feet and answered almost too promptly. Steve Adams loafed near a window and watched.

The puncher said it had been a mean, cold, windy night with restless cattle milling around in circles and likely to start anything. The night herders had their hands full. Gray dawn brought no abatement of the storm.

Daylight revealed that a certain part of the herd was smaller than before, so the men searched, but nothing was found. The wind-blown sands covered all tracks of the vanished herd. Nobody knew where it went.

Wilcox kept smoking during the recital. At its conclusion there was an awkward silence. In some outfits there would have been a wild uproar.

"All right," grunted the boss. "Go back to your work."

The cow-puncher left in a hurry.

Wilcox was not indifferent. He was only puzzled. The old question kept returning to his mind.

"Why do they always pick on this ranch?" he asked Shay again.

"I dunno."

"Were any other man's cattle stolen?"

"Not that I know of. This puncher, Johnny Silver, blew in here about nine o'clock with the news. That's all I know."

"Tell me. Is it possible for three hundred animals to vanish from a well-kept herd?"

"I dunno. It's accordin' to how she's watched. Mebbe on a windy night folks can cut out part of a herd anywhere, no matter how she's guarded."

"All right," nodded the boss.

Later he talked with Steve Adams alone. The loss of the cattle disturbed him more than any one knew. With slim financial resources, with no experience in the cattle business, with dwindling herds and with vast acres to support, Grant Wilcox could ill afford many more reverses.

"Adams," he questioned, "would you let a herd be cut out from under your nose?"

"I'd try not to."

"Not even in bad weather?"

"Well—if I had the right sort of men it'd be pretty hard."

"Suppose you had men who did not care?"

The young man's brow knitted.

"Are you sure of that?"

"No. I am not sure of anything. I am only wondering."

"Um. Well, I wouldn't like to have men around that didn't care."

"That's what I am thinking." Wilcox picked another cigar out of a box. "You are foreman. Use your own judgment."

"Me? Foreman?"

"You know more about cattle than I do. You are young. You fight. Take charge."

The flabbergasted Steve Adams blinked.

"Why—why I don't know anything about this ranch!"

"Neither do I. Neither does any one else, apparently. I want some one who is going to know."

Wilcox sat back and puffed a smoke-screen. He had made his appointment and argued it no further.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, after a minute. "Discharge some of your night-riders?"

Steve stared at the pattern on the blue carpet.

"No. Not till I collect some other riders."

"What is the use of keeping men you can not rely on?"

It was a catch-question, but Steve's answer was ready.

"You can't leave your cattle to wolves and buzzards!"

The boss nearly chuckled.

"Use your own judgment," he grunted. "Where will you get your new men? In town?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure about that town. Why—say, Mister Wilcox, were you joshing when you talked about the boys from Montana?"

The boss smoked some more.

"I was then. I am not now. It looks like a good idea."

Steve mentally reviewed some of his husky young friends in the vast grazing lands from the Oregon to the Platte. "Thanks. I know the men you want. They'll come. Some of them will, sure. They want to travel anyhow."

"All right. Send for them."

LATER Wilcox and Steve started on horseback through the gale to look over the herd. They bundled in overcoats and chose the most direct route to the plains, bracing themselves against biting winds which hurled sand into their eyes.

Wilcox did not announce Steve as his foreman when they reached the main herd. He made no comments or explanations to any one. With his coat-collar turned up, his hat over his eyes and the eternal cigar burning fiercely, he let the punchers talk.

All tracks of the vanished herd were gone. The wind had literally scoured the ground with flying dust and sand.

"We will solve these mysteries," grunted Wilcox on the long trip toward home. "Tomorrow I am going to start riding in a wide circle around the whole ranch. It may take days." He pointed to the hills ahead. "Perhaps we will find places up there where the wind doesn't get into so easily."

That night the boss kept a roaring fire in the old ranch house while the wind screamed outside and shook the doors and windows. Old Man Shay and the wounded Tupper were invited in from the bunk-house, to keep warm. It wasn't the sort of night to stand on rank and ceremony anyhow.

Steve Adams busied himself writing to friends in the north. Tupper and Shay loafed about while Wilcox went over his accounts at the long table, aided by a single lamp. Otherwise the great room was dark except for soft lights dancing from the fireplace.

The men talked in low voices while the window-panes rattled. Then there was a long silence. At last Tupper began crooning the "Cowboy's Lament" and other doleful chants from the great, lonesome, silent lands that produced a minstrelsy all their own.

He sang of death and misadventure. He sang of blue-eyed Sister Sue, and the mother who is in the grave, and the girl who went astray, and the puncher who breathed his last and wanted to be buried in the lone prair-ee. He sang of sad farewells. He sang of gambling, drink, bullet-wounds, broken necks, debt, disaster, and every other dismal, hopeless, horrible heart-throb in the exaggerated poetry of the old cattle ranges, where the cow-puncher translated the eternal silence of earth and stars into melancholy melodies all his own.

Grant Wilcox didn't notice it for a long time, but finally it dinned into his ears, an insistent monotone that vied with the soughing of the frantic winds. The boss stood it patiently, but at last even his endurance gave way.

"Stop it," he begged, looking up from his work.

There was another long silence.

Suddenly a savage, throbbing howl arose from outside, piercing the voice of the winds and tearing it to pieces. It was a weird, blood-curdling shriek calculated to crinkle the hair, tighten the pulse and send icy waves running up and down the spine.

"A wolf," explained Old Man Shay.

The fiendish noise doubled, trebled, quadrupled, multiplied. The sinister cadences trembled up and down the scale, moaned, wailed, screamed and fell again in a supplicating devil's lament that sounded like the lost souls of all the world's existence.

"Two wolves," tallied Shay.

"Two?" questioned the boss.

"Yeh," agreed Tupper. "Sounds like a million, but it ain't only two. Wolves ain't mathematical. They don't add up like they ought."

"Explain."

"Well, take one wolf. It makes a certain amount o' noise. Take two wolves. They ought to make twice as much noise as one wolf but they don't. They make forty times as much."

"Take three wolves. They make a hundred times as much noise as two wolves. Take four wolves. They make two hundred times as much. Now, how much noise would a million wolves make?"

"I give up."

"Same as four wolves. There ain't nothin' in the world can make more noise'n four wolves!"

The wolves were still howling when the men went to their bunk-house and left the boss alone, and the winds still shrieked and roared.

The calm master of the house put away his papers, wound his watch, and picked up his lamp. He halted for a moment at the mantel and looked silently at a photograph of a sweet-faced woman under the great portrait of Jim Wilcox. Then he sought his bedroom.

Hours later he awoke. There was a muffled pounding on the distant front door. Wilcox sat up. His eyes tried to pierce the darkness. A distant voice seemed to call.

Wilcox arose silently, lit a lamp, went into the front room and approached the front door where some one was banging madly. Wilcox didn't usually lock that door, but the winds had demanded that it be held tight. Now he opened it.

The rays of the flickering lamp glinted on a monstrous fluffy black Thing staggering as the cold wind blew inward through the doorway.

It was a creature on two legs but looking like nothing that walks above ground. Its head was streaked with black. Two frantic eyes glared insanely beneath a shining forehead covered by tiny white feathers. The great body was the color of coal, flecked by myriads of gray and white fuzz. A few of the spots blew off and swirled through the door.

The monstrosity opened its mouth.

"For —— sake give me a drink!"

Wilcox looked again into the creature's face, then dragged him inside and turned the lock.

It was the editor of the town newspaper. He had been tarred and feathered.

VII

GRANT WILCOX started the next morning for his examination of the whole vast ranch, taking Steve Adams, Old Man Shay and an extra horse to carry things. It was planned to run along the southern boundary of the ranch into the mountains, and then swing northerly across the vast network of cliffs and peaks which stood like ramparts above the big estate of Jim Wilcox.

The boss was advised not to go. Cutting across those cliffs and ravines was a hard task, as Tupper pointed out. Wilcox made his only comment while the horses were being saddled:

"We will try to stumble across a few trails."

Tupper stayed home and nursed his wounded shoulder. The editor also stayed. He was glad of the rest. His morale was shattered. When he staggered into the house shortly before dawn he was literally a wild man. Wilcox poured him a jolt of whisky that would have paralyzed a mule, but the editor didn't seem to feel it.

He was seething, boiling, raging. He stamped up and down and shrieked for vengeance, shedding tiny feathers all over the floor. He raved like a lunatic. Wilcox gave him a cigar to soothe his nerves. He chewed it up in two minutes.

"The dogs!" he yelled. "The dirty hounds! They sneaked up! They caught me in bed before I could move a finger! Oh, wait till I get at 'em! Ye gods—wait!"

The editor could guess who his enemies were. He opined that his editorial had "burned some people considerable." It had.

They dragged the editor out of bed, bound him, gagged him, took him out to a lonesome place, poured warm tar on him and rolled him in an old feather-bed while a mob of armed night-riders chuckled. After that they tied him on a horse and rode him for dreary miles over wind-swept hills and valleys till they turned him loose.

His subsequent adventures were hair-raising.

While wolves howled in the darkness, he groped ahead without knowing where he was or where he was going. The wolves came nearer. To his mind they had grown into a pack slavering for his blood. He ran like a scared deer. He was still going strong when he struck the lane leading to the Wilcox ranch-house.

It took two hours to calm him and two more to scrub most of the tar off him. Wilcox asked him to stay; so he did. He realized that the cards were stacked against him in town just then.

The boss and his little caravan started out, ready for anything. Their trip was easy enough at first for the storm had subsided. It was late in the afternoon before they approached the larger mountains and almost dusk when they swung to the northward.

Next morning the real work began.

As they climbed into the higher country, hills became cliffs and cañons became gorges. Great walls of granite or deep crevasses blocked their way and made them circle for hours to find crossings. The land grew wilder, a jumble of earth and rock heaped on end for miles. Later they reached certain weird landmarks.

They came upon a mound whose flat sides showed crumbling doorways, windows and stairways where ancient cliff dwellers once lived. Their footsteps echoed in dusty corridors that might have been the halls of a king. They came upon a brown granite mountain that stood straight on end, a giant obelisk rising out of a dusty little yellow plain like a lonely sentinel.

They came upon a dark, narrow gorge and looked down for hundreds of feet where tumbling waters betrayed a great subterranean stream. They climbed a copper-colored mountain by a trail hewed out of solid rock centuries ago by a vanished race. They explored a gorge until they turned a corner where shafts of sunlight flamed on dens of hibernating snakes in a vast satanic colony that looked like Dante's inferno.

There was still no traces of man or domestic beast. Once Shay thought he discerned a nude Indian in the distance, and twice the party came on the tracks of mountain lions, but that was all.

Late in the afternoon they descended a hillside, turned a corner, and beheld a gem of a little lake set in pine trees and girdled with little patches of snow. The opal-green waters were clear and deep, with rocks and the limbs of old trees showing at the bottom. To the travelers it was like a breath of heaven. Grant Wilcox spoke his first words since the trip began.

"Are we on the ranch?"

"We're 'way back of it, said Shay.

THEY camped at the lake shore and next morning they traveled a long, dry mesa under snow-capped hills. Toward mid-afternoon they crossed a series of gullies and ravines. At the fourth gully they halted and looked at each other.

The ground was pounded into dust by the hoofs of countless cattle.

"Sufferin' tomcats!" exploded Shay. "It's the trail of the lost stock!"

"Where does it lead to?" asked the boss.

"Som'res inland."

"Then we will follow it."

The old frontiersman looked dubious. Steve Adams made sure that his six-shooter drew easily and the silent boss lit another cigar. He was the least concerned of the three. Shay wondered if he had sense enough to be scared.

"We're li'ble to bust into somethin' onpleasant if we go clatterin' into any robber's roost this-a-way," cautioned Shay. "We're right in the middle of a cañyon!"

"Where does it go?"

"I dunno. Never been here. She's li'ble to hit another county if she keeps goin'."

"Cattle could be sold there?"

"Yep—or took through to another State!"

Steve Adams had scanned the ground. He discovered something.

"Cattle went through in both directions!"

"Shore 'nuff!" agreed Shay.

"Look!" said Steve. "The hoof-prints goin' back toward the range are smaller than the others. See?"

Wilcox looked to Shay for the explanation. Shay bit off a chew of tobacco and squinted wisely in both directions.

"Them animiles all came up here in a bunch. The calves was picked out and sent back to the ranges with somebody's brand on 'em. They was branded up here. Savvy? The grown animiles kept goin' on into the back country."

"Where did the calves go?"

"I dunno. Look. These yere hills has changed direction. The cañons is all runnin' more north instead of east. This yere trail don't lead downhill to your ranch or even George Minden's. She hits the range 'way north of both o' you. Them rustlers slip around to the north'ard of all the big ranches and slide in here when nobody ain't lookin'."

"We are looking. We will keep going."

"Which way?"

"Into the mountains further."

"Got any idee who might be in there?"

"I am going alone. On foot. We will hide the horses. Shay, you climb those hills to the right. Adams, go up above to the left. You walk up the ridge while I travel along the floor of the cañon. I do not expect speed, but this is the only safe way. Keep in touch with me."

Old Man Shay showed a reluctant admiration. His esteem for the drunkard from the city began to mount. Strategically the move was perfect.

After the parting, Wilcox plodded along the dusty trail and kept in general touch with his flankers. Progress was slow but sure. The gully first widened into a small valley flanked by frowning hills and then narrowed into a gorge. Time went by. Sunset was approaching. Wilcox was about to signal his companions in for the night when he came to a fork in the cañon. Curiosity made him plod onward. The cattle had taken the left turn. So did he.

The gorge became darker and darker, with the late sunlight just touching the tops of the giant cliffs, but Wilcox ambled onward. The crunch of his footsteps echoed against gloomy walls. The gorge darkened even more. Then suddenly it turned. A blaze of sunlight flared against the dull granite.

Grant Wilcox stopped and blinked with astonishment. He felt as if a curtain had lifted on some enchanting piece of stagecraft.

Before him spread a great floor of golden yellow sand, reaching to terraced buttes and pinnacles whose soft colors changed with every tiny shifting of the sun's position. Each hill was a jewel, a glowing rainbow done in pale pink, orange, yellow, brown and emerald, with the lower parts gleaming like copper and the upper parts purple-blue against the sky.

It was not exactly a valley. It was an amphitheater, a mystic place of witchery painted by the gods in a land of eerie silences.

Wilcox was no artist, but the place held him spellbound. He felt like a man in a strange dream, alone in a world that held him in the spell of a marvelous enchantment. Suddenly the overpowering quietude of the place was disturbed. There was a quick whisper as if a bee had flown past to warn the gods against this intruder.

Another bee hummed past, but collided with a rock. The smack brought Wilcox to his senses. He jumped and ran back to the dark recesses of the cañon.

Later, something moved on top of a painted hill to his left. Wilcox stepped out of concealment. The figure disappeared, but in a few seconds something whistled again. From afar came the faint sound of a rifle.

WILCOX now tried deliberately to draw the man's fire, knowing that Steve Adams was up there and not suspected by the rifleman. Wilcox moved from concealment several times. The unknown enemy at length came nearer and fired better. One or two bullets came very close.

"Find anything wuth while?" came a voice at his elbow.

It was Old Man Shay with a six-shooter in his hand.

"I found a man with a rifle," grunted the boss.

"Yeh. It's José Rodrigues. I seen him."

"Who?"

"Rodrigues. He's Tonio Lopez's pardner. That's why I came down here. Adams is over thar with him. Mebbe he needs help."

The boss took the suggestion. They struggled for half an hour to find some way to get up the hills without being targets, and finally they succeeded. Once they heard a sudden fusillade of shots. Fearing for Steve they made haste. They found the young foreman unhurt but mystified. He was scouting around in a maze of shale hills without finding where Rodrigues had gone.

"He ran the minute I started after him," said Steve. "He went around a butte. That was the last I saw of him."

"I wonder if there are any more of them," said the boss.

"I doubt it," replied Steve. "That valley's hard to find. It doesn't need a regiment to guard it!"

"This is a durned myster'ous country," remarked Shay. "Anything's li'ble to happen. Did you notice that little shed down in the valley?"

"No. There was nothing down there."

"You couldn't see from where you was. There was a shed and a water-trough."

"Lead me there."

Shay led the way cautiously. He feared ambuscade, but there was none. Steve was right. Apparently the place had only one sentinel.

After two hours of plunging through dark country Shay led his companions to an old adobe shed under the overhanging wall of a tall butte. While Steve kept watch the boss and Shay went inside and cautiously lit a candle.

The light illumined an old hay mattress, old blankets, odds and ends of saddlery, dirty tinware, canned goods, a little collection of firewood and a lot of long irons in a corner.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Shay. "Look at these irons! Sufferin' tomcats! The J.A.C. brand! Jacob Aaron Curry! It's a wholesale business! They bring hull droves o' cattle up here and brand the calves. The calves go back to the range and jine the Curry outfit. No wonder his ranch is growin'!"

Wilcox sat on a broken barrel and smoked.

"Have the other ranches lost many cattle?"

"A few. Not many, I reckon. Not like us!"

"Then the Wilcox ranch has been dribbling away through this pass."

There was a long silence.

"Why do they pick on my ranch?" insisted the boss.

"I dunno. You asked that before."

"I will ask it again till I find the answer. Come. We will start for home.

"Home? After we've found this place?"

"It will stay."

"That's right." Shay jumped to his feet. "They left Rodrigues! He'll tell 'em! He's ridin' for the range now to spread the news that we're here! We'd better dust out o' here!"

The boss showed no wild alarm. He puffed thoughtfully.

"I am beginning to understand this thing. These fellows are all in together—Lopez, Rodrigues, Curry and all the rest. It looks like a big association."

Shay studied the earthen floor.

"I didn't believe it. Now I have to. I thought them fellers quarreled too much, but now that Rodrigues is keepin' watch over the J. A. C. brandin' irons I reckon you're right. They're all in together. We'd better hit for home!"

But Rodrigues never gave an alarm. There was a reason.

While shooting at Wilcox the Mexican felt the wind of a bullet coming from another direction and he turned to see Steve Adams approaching.

This was more than he expected. He feared that a horde of strangers might be invading this secret headquarters. He dropped all thought of fighting. He only wanted to give the alarm to his friends down on the range. That was what he was here for. He was the sentinel.

AT FIRST he sought his horse. It was some distance away. He ran forward and heard a shot behind him. Firing hastily, he raced around a butte and up a gully to his left, where there were patches of cactus and underbrush. He saw a small, deep crevasse in front of him. It was easy to leap, but his spur caught in a little clump of sage brush just as he jumped. He slid down the slippery crevasse, hitting the bottom with a thud.

He heard Steve Adams running around above him, so he kept still. An hour later he decided to travel, but couldn't work up the smooth walls of the crevasse. He gathered strength and tried again. Later on he yelled.

As he looked up to the higher ground he could see the warm Arizona sun of the Year of Our Lord 1890 kiss the top crust and then softly vanish. Later the cold stars appeared overhead.

He is there yet.

VIII

WISEACRES say that errors come home to roost. A whole flock now descended upon Grant Wilcox. Some were his own mistakes and others were not, but he suffered from all of them.

Steve Adams saw one oversight quickly. Steve decided to look around the range to acquaint himself with conditions at first hand before assuming active charge of the ranch.

Riding through the country like any passing stranger and telling nothing about himself, Steve caught the gossip of the cow camps and learned the ways of the Arizona range. He stumbled on new grazing-lands and water holes. He listened to opinions about the merits of various outfits including his own, which was rated low. He learned the names of bad-men and rustlers. He memorized various cattle-brands. Incidentally he made a study of the Wilcox herds to see how they were being handled.

"You're bein' buncoed," he told the boss, upon his return. "Your stock's grazin' on the poorest land in the whole range. Does somebody want to starve your cattle to death?"

This thing was totally unsuspected. It was a blow. Wilcox looked grim.

"I did not know this. My men have done what they pleased. You are foreman now. Change things."

Steve changed things in good time, but meanwhile Steve himself had become a problem.

The young fellow was highly enamored of a certain little mischief in town who was giving him a merry chase. She esteemed him highly, but she didn't let him know it. She appeared to be capricious, fickle, disdainful and hard to please. Steve did good work on the ranch, but sometimes his face was haggard. The boss said nothing but wished some one would give her a good spanking.

The editor of the town newspaper was another mistake. He was nervous, irascible, critical, quarrelsome and cursed with a sardonic sense of humor, irritating the men with his rapier wit. Wilcox found his guest becoming a nuisance, but the editor didn't dare return to town yet, so the quiet boss suffered in silence.

It looked as if Wilcox were harboring the editor to defy the unruly characters of the range. There were remarks about it in certain quarters.

The boss also realized his mistake in trying with meager capital to handle a business so vast as the ranch. He saw his little funds dwindle, but with land and cattle worth hundreds of thousands he never lost faith that he could pull through. When George Minden made another offer to buy, Wilcox grimly hung on.

Minden arrived one afternoon and brought Martin Bennett, owner of the Big Foot outfit, a large person with black mustache, overhanging eyebrows and thick hair slicked down like a bartender's.

Minden had come to suggest a general round-up for the district.

"We haven't had one for two years," he explained. "The cattle are all mixed up. We figure to have one this spring.

The ranch owners are pretty near agreein'."

"There's one or two questions, though," added Bennett. "There's fellers like Curry. Think we oughta let 'em in on the general round-up?"

"Why not?" asked Wilcox. "I understand the purpose of a round-up is to separate and tally the animals. We can tally Curry's with the rest."

George Minden looked at the grave, drab, bearded stranger who owned this ranch-house.

"Have you any special purpose in that?" questioned Minden.

"Only curiosity."

"I'm cur'ous, too," admitted Bennett. "Some ranches is growin' too fast hereabouts!"

"Mine isn't," grunted Wilcox.

Minden's pleasant face was drawn and thin these days, as if from worry and perplexity. He drummed on the table.

"It never will!" he blurted. "Confound it, Wilcox, you oughtn't to be in the cattle business. You don't understand it. I'll advise you to sell out while you've got something to sell!"

The quiet host wasn't angry. There was a twinkle in his eye.

"I will admit my limitations, gentlemen, but I took charge of the ranch. I can not turn back."

Minden tossed up his hands and snorted.

"You're beaten, but you don't know it. It's a losing fight. I hate to see it!"

"Then why stand by and watch? Why not join together? All of us?"

"What? No! I couldn't help you up and you'd drag me down. You'd drag us all down. You'd be the weak link in the chain. The odds are too big for you. There's things you don't understand." Minden's forehead creased and he slammed a fist on the table. "There's too many of 'em! Too many! It was a mistake to let 'em into the country! If you wanted to fight you should have come a year ago! You're too late! Man, you're whipped before you start!"

Wilcox kept smoking.

"Try one of these cigars," he suggested.

Minden spluttered.

"These fellows are dangerous and you're blind—blind—blind! You haven't rubbed up against 'em yet. Some day they'll come and you'll find out!"

ONE OF them arrived next day, riding a beautiful black horse and jingling with spurs, six-shooters and all the accouterments of a cow-country dandy. It was Jake Curry, with his broad-brimmed hat tied snugly under his lean jaw.

Old Man Shay had caused Curry's visit. Shay had talked about the trip to the mountains and the finding of the Painted Valley. It was another mistake. The news trickled to the range and told the rustlers that their nest was discovered. It also furnished a possible clue to the fate of Rodrigues, who had disappeared. His absence puzzled the range.

When Curry arrived Wilcox chose to sit behind the long table of the ranch-house like a skipper giving an interview to a deck-hand.

"Well?" he asked.

"I hear you've been prowlin' around the hills some."

"Well?"

"Where's Rodrigues?"

"I do not know."

"You don't know nothin' about anything much, do you?"

The silent boss stared. There was no emotion or drama about it. He just stared. The freebooter with the tense face rolled a cigaret.

"I reckon you better loosen your jaw a little," he observed. "You're on a trail that ain't healthy."

"I will be the judge of that."

"Oh, will you? I reckon you're bein' the judge of this here editor, too, ain't you? Keepin' him here, ain't you? All right. Listen here, you! You'll send that editor away and gimme a line on Rodrigues or somethin's goin' to happen *muy pronto. Savvy?* We ain't goin' to waste much time on the likes of you! You'll be a little more sociable or else you won't be around here a-tall. You hear me talk?"

"I hear you. Get out. You are insolent."

"What?" shrieked the gunman. "Insolent?" The right hand of Curry slipped down to his six-shooter and he swung its ugly nose across the table while his voice grew silky.

"I reckon folks don't talk that way to me, mister!"

The bearded ranch-owner looked disgusted.

"When you are through with this theatrical exhibition, kindly get out."

Curry might have blown the boss's head off, but he didn't. His aggressive jaw sagged with astonishment.

He was a hawk-faced killer, ruthless and without conscience, a leader of ruffians because he was the worst and betrayed the fewest sentimental weaknesses; and yet this drab nonentity from the city baffled him. Curry was no joke. Men had quailed before the stare of his cold gray eyes and he feared neither God nor devil, but he couldn't understand this calm citizen who belittled him so casually. It was the worst insult of all. Curry didn't know how to meet it. His hand trembled as he lowered his shining weapon.

"Yeh," he muttered, slowly. "She's a theatrical exhibition. Don't mind me. I jest rode here for exercise." The scourge of the range sheathed his weapon and strode toward the door. "Hope you like the show. The next act comes pretty soon."

The gunman opened the door and turned, a slim, slightly bow-legged devil in fleecy white chaps and blue shirt. He flung two contemptuous words and disappeared.

"You—you woodenhead!" he barked.

TWO weeks later the editor staged a scene almost the same. The editor had abused his privileges. He was a nervous, explosive person with nothing to do and he soon rebuked folks as he pleased. As Wilcox said nothing his remarks became more and more liberal.

Two cow-punchers on the range finally took offense during an editorial visit and chased that citizen earnestly for fifteen miles. They stormed into the ranch-house with the fugitive somewhat in the lead but badly ruffled. Wilcox held an investigation, sitting as judge behind the long table. His verdict was impartial.

"There has been too much trouble around here and not enough discipline. I will have to ask all you gentlemen to leave the ranch."

The cow-punchers growled, swore and made threats, but they left. The editor was more subtle. Standing in the doorway in his borrowed clothes, he fingered his pointed beard and looked at the boss more in anger than in sorrow. Wilcox had not taken his advice about many things. The boss was stolid, stubborn, immovable and not always impressed by the editor's wisdom.

"You're an ass!" announced the parting guest.

The boss took his cigar out of his mouth.

"I am sorry you said that."

"I'm sorry I have to ——."

"Good-by."

"Oh, go to the ——."

The editor soon found that he could return to town because the range-riders felt he had learned his lesson, so the newspaper soon appeared again.

The silent boss of the Wilcox outfit was advertised all over the district as a fool and a drunkard.

IX

GRANT WILCOX affronted the whole range when he imported the men from Montana. Even the reputable Arizona punchers looked askance. Arizona has its pride. Its citizens felt that this invasion from another State cast reflections on Arizona's ability to handle its own situations. The newcomers were given a cold reception.

The silent man at the hacienda lost sympathy when sympathy was needed, but from another view-point the newcomers were a huge success. They were healthy, husky young ruffians who could hold their own with bronco, rope, profanity or six-shooter against any one.

They came by ones and twos, some riding their own ponies and others arriving by train. They had decorated themselves with such names as Wind River Pete, Cheyenne Charlie, Boise Jimmy, Crow Foot Sam, Sweetgrass Mike or Anaconda Phil, and they threw themselves on Steve Adams with lusty vigor and voiced profane amazement that such a moon-faced, slab-sided, weak-minded son-of-a-gun had ever been chosen foreman.

They ate like wolves. They made unruly sounds emanate from the bunk house by night. They wrestled and argued. They rode like centaurs, roped like artists and shot like experts. They were clear-eyed, clean-limbed, muscular, active, inquisitive and totally unabashed by anything except the quiet boss whose aloofness they couldn't quite bridge.

They came from Montana because adventure called them. Steve Adams had written them about local conditions and Montana was quiet just then anyhow.

Trouble started when Steve began to discharge his other men. They came to the ranch-house and wanted reasons. The boss made no explanations.

"I reckon Arizona wranglers ain't good enough for you," remarked one of them, sarcastically.

"Some are not."

This reply was distorted and sent over the range, helping to make things uncomfortable for the boys from Montana. For a month they had a rough, lonely time, bedeviled by dozens of malicious acts from certain quarters while the reputable outfits shrugged shoulders and stood aloof.

Accounts of the malicious acts trickled to the ears of the boss. News of one of them arrived before it happened.

Wilcox was riding toward the range one afternoon and came to the yellow valley where his squatter friends lived. As he rode through the little pass he noticed improvements. The homeless, shiftless Missourians had tried to make good.

The old adobe house was repaired. So was the well in front of it. The fields were plowed. The front yard was hoed in regular rows and things were starting to sprout. The fence was in better condition. Over the loose wire gate hung a hide, showing that the squatter had slain fresh meat for his own use, as was allowable by the law of the range.

The hide was a big black one, badly scratched and torn. Wilcox examined it closer. It was Old Misery, the crazy steer of the blood feud, the hoodoo of the range.

"Howdy, Mister Wilcox!" greeted Jasper Tibbs, coming around the corner of the house. "Come in! Gennerveeve, she's jest fixed up a bilin' of stew."

"How was the meat?"

"Pow'ful tough! Gennerveeve, she's biled it two days and it still haint fit for human vittles. Come in and have some."

"No, thanks. I am just going past. I'm glad you shot the steer."

Jasper Tibbs leaned on his hoe and peered shrewdly at the quiet visitor.

"Mebbe they's more shootin's to come and they hain't goin' to be steers, nuther!"

Wilcox waited.

"I hain't the man to bite the hand that comforts me!" blurted the lank Missourian. "Look yere, Mister Wilcox—watch them herds o' yours right smart! They're a-goin' to git stampeded!"

"How do you know?"

"Wal, they's a heap o' folks 'round yere that thinks I'm right hostile to you because I'm a-campin' on yore land. I let 'em keep thinkin' thataway. That's how I l'arn things. I cain't say no more, Mister Wilcox, but you watch them herds tonight, tomorrow or next day!"

Wilcox struck the flat lands late in the afternoon. He rode forward for miles along the plain until almost sunset. Then he saw he was too late.

FAR ahead was a great dust cloud that blurred the whole northeastern sky line. As he urged his horse onward he saw a mighty mass racing away from him, a mass that stretched clear across the horizon and surged toward the darkening eastern sky. He jabbed spurs to his horse. He thought he observed an excited human figure or two, but the rest was dust, darkness and tossing horns.

The boss overtook the rear of the mass gradually as the frantic animals pushed and battered and gored. There was a sound of great bodies colliding, and of grunts when they knocked the wind out of each other. His horse leaped a carcass trodden almost beyond recognition, then another, then more of them. A sea of tossing horns stretched ahead to infinity, and the thunder of the hoofs roared in his ears like the booming of breakers in a typhoon.

"They used gunpowder!" screamed Steve Adams, tearing past on a lathered horse while trying to be on all sides of the vast herd at once, "Started 'em goin' in a rush! It's an all night job!"

It was an all night job and then some. The boys turned the herd at last but next morning it was a haggard foreman who reported to his boss, bringing a couple of the boys with him.

"It's a dead loss," reported Steve. "About a hundred went down. Gopher holes, mostly. Then there's the damage to the cattle themselves. They've lost about a million pounds of meat off their ribs!" Steve fondled the butt of his six-shooter. "Some day I reckon I'll meet the fellows that done it."

"Who were they?"

"I can only guess."

"Couldn't you spare any men to find out?"

"No, sir. Too busy."

"All right. We will get a few extra men. Then shoot first and find out afterward!"

Four more men were added to the pay-roll in the next few weeks and they happened to be Arizonans, carefully selected. It made the range a little more friendly to the outfit.

Wilcox was uneasy over the pay-roll and the wanton loss of his cattle, but he kept somberly on his way and said nothing.

There were visitors to the ranch-house that month. Various ranchers arrived, curious because the town newspaper had given Wilcox such an amazing reputation. The boss saw himself lampooned and ridiculed every week. His person appealed to the editor's sardonic sense of humor, but the editor overreached himself. He made Wilcox so grotesque that folks were eager to look at him. When they met the quiet boss they became thoughtful.

The whole episode gave Wilcox a wide acquaintance in the district.

The old ranch-house also became well acquainted with cavalry officers whose blue uniforms became a familiar sight. Grant Wilcox was becoming resigned to his rôle of ranch owner when a stranger arrived in a rented buggy.

Wilcox was away at the time, but due to return. The stranger was admitted after parley. He was a big, broad, sunburned fellow wearing a heavy blue suit and a peaked cap which belonged on no cattle ranch from Texas to Washington State. The men tried to draw him out, but he barked terse profanity and they let him alone.

The boss strode across the porch after dark and opened the door. He saw the figure sitting at the lamplit table and halted. He stared. For a second he was unsteady, as if seeing a ghost.

"Sellers!" he gasped.

The stranger jumped up.

"Yes, skipper; it's me."

Wilcox couldn't seem to find words. At last he walked forward and put a hand on the man's shoulder. The contact restored his poise.

"I thought you were under twenty fathoms of water," he grunted.

"No, skipper. We rode it out in the long boat—me and Blum and—and her!"

Grant Wilcox slammed the man into the chair. His voice fairly thundered.

"Don't lie to me, Sellers!"

"I'm not lyin'. She's alive. Like I am. That's why I came here!"

* * *

THE boss looked like a man in a trance. His cigar was on the floor, forgotten.

"It can't be," he grunted. Then he spoke past history, coldly and logically.

"The typhoon twisted the rudder out. The old *Andrina* piled on that coral reef. Her keel was ripped away and her sticks went over. I stood at the port rail and watched the boat go. There was no room for me. She—she went. I made her go. I saw the boat turn over and throw every soul out of it. I saw it. I saw it."

"It turned clear over," interposed the sailor. "It came right side up with me and Blum and her still clingin' on. Every one else was gone. A wooden boat, remember. Waterlogged but wooden. Under most o' the time. We saw you topple over when a breaker hit you. She screamed. We lashed her down—Gawd knows how we done it—but she kept screamin'. We stayed two days adrift after the storm went down. Suffered. A kag o' water in the cubby-hole saved us. A Dutch trader picked us up."

The boss was looking into space.

"It doesn't seem possible."

"I'm here," reminded the sailor, as proof. "How did you live through it?"

"I was thrown on the reef," said Wilcox, absently. "A native *proa* came along later. I got to Manila and Hong Kong— Where is she?"

"Australia. She's—she's married to Blum. Blum, the passenger."

The boss took it queerly. He picked his cigar from the floor and lit the wrong end without noticing.

"That's why I'm here," continued the sailor. "He—she— Oh, —— it, you know Blum!"

"Yes. I know Blum. Yes."

"He opened a shop in Sydney. Ship-chandler. One room in the back to live and a bell to tinkle when a cust'mer comes in. She married him. You was dead, she thought, and she didn't know nobody but Blum on that side of the world. I'd went my own way, cap'n, or I'd-a tried to stop it. He walks with his sea-boots on, does Blum. He says he's a two-fisted man. That's Blum. He makes her wait on him and wait on the store while he nags people and rows with the police. That's Blum!"

There was a long silence.

"How did you know I was alive?" asked Wilcox.

"I was in a railroad office in 'Frisco. I heard your name spoke. Somebody said you was a good sailor but a rotten bad clerk. They said you'd worked there. I didn't believe it, only I kept askin'. I met clerks that knew you. They said you'd come down here. Described the cut of your jib exactly. I wondered about it so I came down to see for myself. I'm on my way to N'York to take a second mate berth on a coaster."

There was another long silence. The forecastle hand knew the master's habits and waited. He waited over-long.

"Take her away!" he pleaded. "If she only knew you was alive——"

There were tight lines around the mouth of Grant Wilcox and his eyes looked stricken, but his reply was cold.

"I have set my shoulder to the wheel here. I can not turn back."

"But——"

"If I drop everything here I can do nothing there. I would lose both ways, for I haven't the money. This thing must work itself out. He is her husband. Remember that."

"But—cap'n—so are y——"

"Stow it! I will act in good time. Thank you for telling me all this. Come. I will show you your room."

But after the wondering sailor had gone to bed the boss sat for hours in front of the fireplace, staring at the embers till they died and the dawn came. It was a terrible vigil. It tore at every fiber of his being and put new lines on his face; but his final decision was the same as before. He must stay by the ranch.

Next morning Grant Wilcox appeared blear-eyed and unkempt, with touseled hair and bloated face.

"It's a darned shame!" bawled Tupper to the cook. "He can't let it alone after all!"

"What?" asked the cook.

"The boss was drunk again last night!"

"How do you know?"

"Look at his face."

The cook soon made a quick inspection.

"Yeh. That's right," he agreed.

X

THE spring round-up was the most stupendous thing Grant Wilcox ever saw. It was a matter of hundreds of square miles and tens of thousands of stamping, snorting cattle. It was a matter of noise, dust, color, odor, perspiration, thundering hoofs, bucking horses, roping, bulldogging, branding, profanity and hard work.

The affair took in nearly a dozen big outfits. Each outfit sent its men and each man rode a string of ponies which added to the mighty concourse of restless animals.

The herds and strays were gathered from within a circle fifty miles in diameter and held at a point ten miles east of Three Buttes ranch, near the banks of a small stream. Here was the camp and headquarters, where branding irons were kept red-hot and the smell of burning cowhide arose like a smell of Gehenna.

But branding was only an incident. There were cattle that insisted on breaking through the cordon. There were neck-breaking chases over hills and gullies. There were stubborn cow-ponies that had to be "unroostered." There were broken bones to be mended and hungry cow-punchers to be fed. The cook-wagons of three outfits could hardly supply the demand.

Trouble between the warring factions was ignored for the time. Every man had the holy concentration of a workman at his job. The whole show was staged under direction of a grizzled old veteran foreman famous for his sagacity in "mixing the medicine" when assigning the men to their tasks. Steve Adams and the other foremen worked like ordinary punchers. There was only one foreman who was recognized during the round-up.

The silent boss of the Wilcox herds rode around or stood at vantage-points, looking on. He spent most of the time keeping out of the way. Nobody noticed him but he noticed everything.

There had been tumultuous days that Spring. A new band of rustlers appeared in the county. Certain visiting "bad-men" vied for prestige with the local ones, causing several commendable funerals. In town, quarrels and shootings increased. A railroad train was held up. The big loot caused others to try the same adventure, keeping the sheriff on the jump.

On the range, cattle disappeared from various outfits at times and one or two running gun-fights had resulted. The Wilcox outfit lost some stock but Steve Adams and the boys were on their toes. Stealing Wilcox cattle was now a dangerous business. Attempts were now less frequent.

But under this comparative security was a feeling of uneasiness. The boys knew their enemies were not sleeping but waiting.

Steve Adams and the Montanans were marked men. They had dared to fight. They had also blockaded the old robbers' trail from the plains to the Painted Valley. The pirates of the range had to detour many long miles when they drove stolen cattle out of the country. It was very inconvenient.

The rustlers didn't lay the blame for their troubles on Wilcox. They blamed Steve Adams.

In their minds the drab, silent drunkard from San Francisco didn't have the sense to bring about these changes. He was a nonentity, but Steve had flouted the mighty Tonio Lopez and exchanged shots with the vanished José Rodrigues, whose disappearance was never explained by any one. At the big round-up there were muttered talks about Steve.

Grant Wilcox saw it. The furtive citizens who operated from the Curry ranch were plotting something.

Steve didn't notice it. He didn't even notice his boss just then. He knew he didn't have to.

In the past few weeks Steve had gained an immense regard for the man. Wilcox never failed to do his part. When Steve hired certain men the boss backed his judgment. When Steve fired others, the boss backed him up. When Steve wanted repairs to buildings, or changed grazing grounds, the boss backed him up. Steve had made mistakes, but the boss backed him up. There was no complaining or arguing. Steve's feet were on solid ground.

And yet Grant Wilcox was "broke!"

As the boss watched the thousands of cattle swing past he realized that these were his only assets. Ordinary running expenses had practically taken his last dollar and he had tried for no more loans.

"Steve," he said, during a lull in operations, "how many cattle have we?"

"Dunno. Mebbe the count'll show ten-twelve thousand. Why?"

"Can you pick out the best animals to keep, and send the rest to market?"

"Why, sure, only the market's low just now. How many did you figure on sellin'?"

"Half of them."

"Half? Why, you'd strip the ranch bare!"

"All right. Strip."

Steve looked puzzled. "It's sure a poor time to sell. The cattle-buyers ain't offerin' hardly anything."

"I want the cash."

Steve was bewildered. It meant a shrinking of assets and loss of prestige.

"Why not sell just enough for your needs?" suggested Steve.

The boss puffed a smoke-cloud under his hat-brim.

"Steve, I was in the Navy. I learned what it means to clear ship for action. Life-boats are among the first to go overboard. It is sometimes a case of save the life-boats or save the ship. This ranch is going to be a fighting ranch. She's almost awash but we'll save her yet. We will scuttle the life-boats."

Steve caught the general idea.

"All right, sir. If we have to, we must."

"And look out for Tonio Lopez. I see you two have been working together at the branding. Take no chances."

Steve shook his head.

"It's all right. Curry's just as anxious to get a tally as we are. There won't be any trouble till the round-up's over."

STEVE'S prophecy was correct, but the boss was convinced that something was afoot. He noted a dozen guarded conversations between gentry of the range.

There was a big dance at the Three Buttes ranch-house after the round-up. Folks came for miles and even from the town. It was like a camp-meeting. The roads and trails were filled with buckboards, spring wagons, buggies and cayuses making for Three Buttes, with everybody all dressed up and ready for a gorgeous time.

The dance was held in the big parlor of the old white two-story ranch-house which stood in a grove of locust and umbrella trees. Barns and corrals were full to overflowing that night. A maze of buggies and wagons spread far into a field, with horses tied to the wheels or hitched to trees.

It was an epoch-making dance. George Minden dispensed a courtly hospitality equally lavish in word and deed. The postmaster from town was there with his wife. So was the leading merchant, two prominent bartenders and a clergyman, with their families. There were ranch owners and foremen galore. The local

Indian tribe sent old Chief Amaho, who found the liquid refreshments early and stayed there. The town editor was also present, saying witty things, but getting away with it. Old Jed Halloway came down from the Nampa hills with his fiddle while José Gomez with his guitar and Chico Salazar with his mandolin helped to make the rafters tingle with their thumping music.

It was a ramping, stamping dance. The lamps flickered constantly with concussions from booted feet. Couples fairly crammed the floor. Those who didn't dance herded around the front door or swapped yarns in the kitchen or sampled various brands of red-eye from hospitable buckboards or spring wagons.

Grant Wilcox mingled with the aristocrats in a big room just off the main parlor, where the other ranch owners flocked. Each paladin of the range wore his store clothes, so nobody was quite comfortable and the talk was rather forced. The young fellows also wore their civilian regalia, but under every coat was the butt of a gun. Men who might have left them home decided to wear weapons when they thought of general conditions on the range. It was a jolly, carefree party—but the men wore their six-shooters.

Wilcox advised Steve Adams not to go.

"I do not like the look of things," he grunted. "Stay away."

"I can't," demurred Steve. "Daphne—my girl—is coming with her folks. It wouldn't be right not to show up."

"No," agreed the boss, drily. "You couldn't stand it."

It was a proud Steve Adams who led his girl into the great crowd. She was a gasp. Pretty, coquettish, graceful and dressed with some regard for style, she captured the meeting from the start. It was almost a stampede. Poor Steve had to fight for every favor he got.

But if Daphne was a gasp, Gennerveeve was a scream. Clad in a home-made green gown with yellow trimmings, she arrived on horseback with her lanky father and brother, took off her spurs, and was soon pounding the floor with the best of them. Grant Wilcox was amazed at her vigor.

There were comments about Wilcox, too. The town paper had done its work. People looked at him curiously. The wife of the postmaster voiced the general impression:

"So that's the drunkard. H'm. I don't see why folks make so much talk about him. Why, he looks runty!"

Wilcox didn't hear it. He was watching Jake Curry and certain other persons. Curry now owned thirty-five hundred cattle, an astonishing increase to his herd. Wilcox remembered the remark of an old puncher when the total was announced:

"If Curry keeps up that lick he'll own the range in three years. Then he'll be rich enough to turn respectable."

Wilcox saw Curry in a new light. The lean-jawed gunman with the cold eyes was no thoughtless adventurer making trouble for pure deviltry. He was a schemer, eaten by ambition and not to be halted short of death. He was a master, a driver, an executive, a leader of men. His tight mouth, aquiline nose and merciless eyes proved it.

Wilcox noticed Curry make a slight motion of his head to certain men loafing near the door. The men separated as if by signal. They edged toward Steve Adams, who was backing away after talking with a woman. Some of them got behind him. One of them faced him and touched his shoulder.

It was Tonio Lopez.

WILCOX started forward, but too late. He had to cross the whole room. Lopez made some remarks to Steve, smiling as he talked. Steve's face turned savage. He swung his fist to strike but his hands were pinioned from behind.

"You lie!" choked Steve, struggling with his captors.

"Cool down!" advised one of the men holding him.

But Steve writhed and twisted wrathfully. His eyes were lambent flames. The smiling Tonio Lopez had deliberately stepped up to Steve and uttered a vulgar history of Steve's girl which no man on earth could brook.

Lopez had never seen the girl before. He invented it on the spur of the moment. It was sufficient.

"Let me at him!" cried Steve. "Lemme at him!"

"Shut up!" hissed one of those holding him. "Want to bust up the dance?"

"Leggo!" panted Steve.

"But it may be true," insisted the sneering Tonio Lopez, whose arms were also pinioned by his friends for effect.

Steve leaped and dragged his captors with him, but the force of their combined bodies was too great. By this time the affair was attracting general attention. Folks were standing up and looking. Men crowded in to see what was going on. Wilcox arrived early.

"What is this?" demanded the boss.

"I can't tell you!" gasped Steve. He looked at Lopez with murderous eyes. "Come outside—Come out!"

"Do you insist?" asked Lopez.

Steve launched a stream of insults which made even the swarthy face of Lopez flush. Lopez jerked his hands away from his friends.

"All right! Come on! Come on!"

"Stop!" commanded the boss. "Here, you men. Let go of Adams. What devil's business is this? Steve, speak up!"

"I can't tell you."

"You are going outside with these men?"

"Yes."

"Stop it. This is a trap!"

"I'm going!"

"I forbid it!"

The flaming eyes of Steve Adams looked at his employer.

"I'll take your orders about anything else, Mister Wilcox, but this here is personal."

The boss stared. Then he turned his back without argument. It looked queer. Some of the men around Steve were surprized, but they soon forgot about it.

Daphne elbowed through the crowd. She had heard that Steve Adams was in the mixup near the door.

"What is it?" she asked, grabbing his arm.

"Nothing."

She looked puzzled.

"There is something! I don't know what it is, but don't do it! Don't do it!" She clung to his arm and looked up at him. "There's something wrong, Stevie. What is it?"

Steve turned away.

"I'll be back in a minute."

"No! Stevie!"

There was a mocking echo from Tonio Lopez.

"No, Stevie!"

Steve's muscles twitched, but there were too many persons between them.

"Come on!" he choked. "Let's start it!"

The crowd surged to the porch, with Steve and Lopez near the center. They halted for parley just beyond the porch, with the strains of the Arkansaw Traveler coming through the lighted windows.

"There is too much crowd here!" suggested Lopez. "Some one will be hurt! Here I have it! Come! Around the barn there a ditch, over by the alfalfa field. I go ahead. You come behind me. See? Yes! I turn when I reach the ditch. It is dark. The chances are even. Come!"

Steve was seeing red. He forgot everything else.

"All right! Lead on! I'll get you anywhere!"

Lopez started walking away. The crowd spread on his flank, but away from any line of fire. It was a very mixed collection, mostly curious punchers who wanted to see the fight. They watched Lopez go without comment.

Steve started forward also.

"Come on!" taunted Lopez from the darkness ahead.

"I'm coming!" promised Steve.

"He's losin' his mind!" bawled Tupper. "Dog-gone it, this don't look right!"

And Tupper followed along the flank of Steve Adams, unobserved.

The boss had disappeared behind the house. With a jerk of his head he had summoned his men. The boss told a few men to lurk near Steve. Five others he drew aside.

"Mount your horses and await orders."

"Hosses?" exclaimed one of them.

"Horses!"

The men didn't like to be sidetracked.

"Huh!" snorted one of them. "Lopez ain't ridin' tonight."

"Mount!"

THERE was a snap to the order. The men sought their horses. The boss moved forward toward the ditch with his cigar glowing brightly.

"What is it?" came Daphne's worried voice alongside him. "Something awful is happening. What is it?"

The boss rightly assumed that Steve's girl had been involved in the case. Nothing else could make Steve lose his head. Wilcox now felt that she had been in it enough.

"I don't know yet. Stay here."

"But——"

"Stay here!"

The girl halted and wondered. The boss went ahead and rounded the barn.

The ditch was some distance away and bordered by a row of tall trees. A form could be seen stumbling into the ditch. It was Lopez. Another form, nearer to Wilcox, strode toward the line of trees, with something that glinted dully in its hand.

"Now I got you!" came an exultant cry from the ditch.

There was a streak of yellow flame and a sharp report. The dark form of Steve Adams halted and a line of fire streaked from his six-shooter.

Suddenly a volley flared from the ditch. Half a dozen weapons exploded in unison. There was a yell of triumph. Steve fired in return, just as he pitched forward to the ground.

The tragedy took every one by surprize. There was silence for three quivering seconds.

"My ——!" shrieked Tupper. "Ambushed! You call this fair play? Come on, boys! At 'em!"

Tupper's pistol started banging. There was a noise of bodies running forward toward the ditch. Some one else fired. More joined in. The crackling and banging now resembled firecrackers. The line halted and seemed to take stock of itself. Someone dropped with a grunt. The shooting became frantic.

There was a confusion of yelling, howling and cursing. Some one alongside Grant Wilcox seemed to let off a young cannon. The concussion made his ear ring. Something whipped through the air beside him. He didn't notice it.

From the ditch came lines of flame, flashing, flashing, flashing like devil's tongues out of the darkness of the Pit. They came from farther away, and still farther, as if retreating.

The murderers were making their getaway!

Wilcox cupped his hands.

"Charlie! Pete! Sam!" he roared backward toward the barn. "Ride a circle around them! Get every man!"

Before the startled crowd could understand, there was a yell and the clatter of horses' hoofs. A cavalcade rushed from behind the barn.

The great, dark mass started off to the left. It thundered across the ditch and tore onward like mad. Suddenly their weapons flashed. The assassins were flanked by a raking fire. They realized their plight too late. There were yells and screams and confusion. Some one started running between the distant riders. There was a crunch as a horse rode him down. Shots came from the ground and into the ground.

Tupper, Wilcox and the others who faced the ditch went forward, trying to piece the thing together, but the action was too confused. It was a mess of trampling horses, dodging men, pistol shots and yells.

In the far distance came the pounding of hoofs that had half completed the circle. A form again tried to dodge between the horsemen. There was a last shot. The form subsided. Then came silence except for the horses' hoofs making a return circle.

"Boss!" yelled Tupper. "Cap'n! We got 'em!"

But Wilcox wasn't listening. He was bending over Steve Adams, who was coughing with a bullet in his lung.

Lanterns flashed behind them. Voices called. There were feminine cries. People had poured out of the ranch-house. The music was silent. Swaying lights and shadows fell on the faces of an awe-stricken crowd. A lantern flared on the side of a great white barn where a cluster of people was gathered around a gasping man. The ranch-house windows and the porch was crowded. Women with shawls over their heads chattered excitedly.

A lantern's light fell on Wilcox and Adams. There was a rustle of skirts.

"Stevie!" screamed Daphne.

She rushed up, knelt, took his head in her lap and stroked his forehead. She was not coquettish any more as she looked up at the boss with mute questioning. Steve's face seemed to light at the touch of her. The boss arose.

"Take care of him, girl," he grunted. "You can do better than I can." And he patted her head and strode away.

Tupper came up with a lantern. Behind him were the Wilcox riders, stern-faced and carrying six-shooters in their hands. Their horses were snorting and white-eyed, lacerated with the rowels of spurs.

"Phil got it!" choked Tupper. "Shot right 'longside you! Oh, the —— —— ——! Thank —— we got 'em all!"

"It was the boss done it," muttered Wind River Pete. "I didn't know why he wanted us to mount. I know now!"

"I knew there was treachery," said Wilcox.

"There shore was!" agreed Tupper.

But Wilcox had turned away with a heavy heart. Up ahead, lanterns were gleaming between the trees of the ditch and the somber boss went forward to count the cost of victory.

He loved Steve Adams as a son. He was fond of the cheery boy they called Anaconda Phil. He wondered if blood-guilt were not on his own head for calling in these boys to fight his battles. He knew some one had to battle for the liberties of the range, but now he saw what it meant in bloodshed and monstrous cruelty. He felt sick at heart.

But though his mind was in agony his face was impassive and he puffed at his cigar from pure mechanical habit.

On the ground lay seven men, crumpled in sprawling positions in the field behind the ditch, motionless forever. The flickering lantern-lights played over them and glared upon the terrible marks of gunshot wounds.

One of them was Tonio Lopez.

The men nearest Wilcox watched him curiously and whispered to each other. He caught the voice of the closest one.

"My ——, he's a wooden man! Smokin' a seegar like he was in a parlor! No heart, no feelin's, nothin'!"

The boss, standing over the wilted body of Lopez, turned and stared.

XI

THE slaughter of the Three Buttes ditch electrified the county. The gun-battle that ended George Minden's dance was a declaration of war that could not be misunderstood. The next month was a bloody one on the range.

The sheriff soon arrived at the Wilcox ranch-house, coming in state with several deputies for an official investigation, which also meant visits to the Minden ranch. The sheriff heard many versions of the affair, but nobody admitted starting the fight so he finally gave it up as a bad job. He had other troubles anyhow.

"I reckon you done pretty well," he told Wilcox. "If you shoot a few more like Tonio Lopez mebbe the range'll be cleaner. If you need any help, call on me."

There the investigation ended.

Steve Adams lingered at the Three Buttes ranch, hovering on the shores of Lethe. Minden showed a frantic desire to see him recover, and stubbornly remained to help nurse him, although the ranch-owner's fullest attention was demanded on the range.

Wilcox appreciated Minden. As he watched the restless, haggard, worried, likeable host he was thankful that Steve had fallen into such good hands. Wilcox was no help in a sick-room and he knew it. He only stayed by, patiently and mutely, without smoking.

Daphne also stayed with Steve. She was no longer coquettish. After the first shock of horror at the murders she was cool and resolute. She compelled her parents to let her remain at Three Buttes. Wilcox marveled at her efficiency. She was a woman now, a gentle, quiet, tireless woman with a wistful look in her eyes that the boss sympathized with.

Wilcox himself showed the marks of the struggle. As the days passed he became a little more silent, grim and austere. Tragedies crowded upon him. Incidents came thick and fast. He was the pivot of a whirlwind.

For his temporary foreman the boss chose Wind River Pete, a freckled young fellow who knew cattle and talked with a slow drawl. In three days Pete was brought to the ranch-house with his thigh shattered and blood oozing from his right shoulder. He had met some persons who were rebranding Wilcox calves.

Two days later a man named Jamieson, an Arizonan on the ranch, was found in a gully with his jaw almost shot off. A straw-covered wagon brought him to the ranch-house and a doctor was again rushed from town.

A week later the boss was riding with Crow Foot Sam. They met strangers who opened fire at sight. For the first time Wilcox used a six-shooter. He had thought it theatrical to wear one, but gradually he realized the desperation of this range war and armed himself.

He was forced to shoot when he and Sam suddenly came on a gathering of hostile strangers in the foothills, but the odds were too great and Wilcox and Sam made a sullen retreat. A stray bullet smashed Sam's right foot. The boss had trouble getting him home.

The ranch-house began to resemble a hospital. Red bandages and the smell of drugs were all over the place. The lines on the boss's face grew deeper. He was fond of his boys.

Another loss was felt when a good half of all his cattle left him.

They were rounded up and driven to the railroad in a vast herd whose dust could be seen for miles. They had been sold by the hundred, on the hoof. Trains were ready to whisk them to the eastern markets.

The herd was well guarded on the journey and there were no untoward incidents. In town, the silent boss perched on a rail and whittled thoughtfully while half his ranch stamped through the great cattle-pens and disappeared into car after car, finally vanishing forever down the long steel road that led toward the rising sun. The sale brought Wilcox money enough to carry him for a long time, but it left him dejected.

George Minden had offered to buy the cattle. Wilcox refused. He believed Minden had all he could handle.

MINDEN soon had another burden. The story of the gun-battle was published in the town newspaper. The editor in his glee wrote it up with vigor and abandon. The rustlers and gangsters had lost some friends and were not in a humorous mood. The editor beat them out of town by a hair. He finally turned up at Minden's ranch.

Wilcox disliked his turbulent presence in a sick-room but trusted to the tact and strength of George Minden.

Wilcox found himself the talk of the county. The range woke up. It saw that the leader was not Steve Adams but the quiet stranger from the cities. The flanking ride of the Wilcox horsemen on that memorable night opened people's eyes. The silent boss received sympathy from unexpected quarters. Strange ranch-owners came to see him and decent citizens from town made furtive visits to give congratulations.

Wilcox found time to visit Yellow Valley to see how his squatter friends were getting along. They were prospering. Yellow Valley was yellow no longer. The crops were growing finely. The wire fence was in better condition. The house was clean and its roof was repaired. Gennerveeve sang as she mauled the family washing.

Tibbs welcomed Wilcox, but voiced forebodings.

"I hain't so sure as haow they's things goin' on hereabouts that ain't right," he opined. "Matters is sho' heapin' up pow'ful myster'ous!"

"How?"

"I dunno, but I'm a watchin' mighty peart!"

The boss was going to say "poppycock," but he only nodded.

"Thanks. Tell me anything else you hear."

Two days later Wilcox received a visit from Jake Curry. Curry came alone. He knocked at the ranch-house door politely and seemed quite genial, though his cold eyes always kept shifting sideways. It was a habit of Curry's.

"Well?" asked the boss, behind the long table.

"I'm here to see if mebbe we can't have peace."

It made Wilcox puff at his cigar for some time. Curry seated himself in the nearest chair and hitched his gun into his lap.

"What do you want peace for?" asked the boss.

"To stop all this trouble."

"Stop it, then."

"What terms are you offerin'?"

"Terms?"

"Sure. You don't want your men to git shot up all the time, do you?"

"Oh, you want peace if I buy you off."

"Suit yourself about the language."

"You are impudent."

"Suit yourself."

The boss kept smoking. He was too interested to lose his temper now. Curry was either whipped and trying a monumental bluff, or else he had come with a definite mission. Wilcox was curious.

"What do you want? Say it."

"I want your ranch."

"Oh."

"I reckon mebbe you can fix a low price. You don't want no more trouble, do you? I'll buy any time you say."

Curry was far from whipped!

"Where would you get the money?" inquired Wilcox.

"That's my business."

"There is something behind all this."

"You can think what you want. I want the ranch!"

Wilcox stared. Curry was an intense person and the stare made him nervous. His hand slipped to the butt of his six-shooter, but Wilcox had forgotten all about six-shooters and such things. He was wondering what got into Curry. He stared with a concentrated thoughtful stare that made the gunman wiggle.

"Well, say it!" snarled Curry.

"You are insolent. You had better get out."

"Then you won't sell the ranch, hey?"

The eyes of the boss twinkled.

"Your methods of persuasion hardly encourage me."

"Oh. Mebbe you want me to bend a six-gun over your head."

"I doubt if that would help you any."

"No. I reckon not. You're too thick in the skull."

The boss sat back. His voice was very deliberate.

"Just what is the reason for this? Are you trying to enrage me so you will have an excuse for murder?"

"Naw. I want your ranch. I came on business."

"All right. Business is over. You may go."

"Yeh. I'll go. You're too bull-headed to deal with. I'll have to git a few more fellers before you'll see the light. Mebbe I'll have to give 'em what I gave John Hastings."

"It was out before Curry realized it.

"Oh. So you killed Hastings."

"It was a fair fight! He shot at me and I shot at him. He missed. I didn't."

"What were you doing just before the shooting?"

"That's my business!"

"It may be a jury's business. Hastings was on his own ground attending to his duty. He was shot by a trespasser."

"It was a fair fight! It was self-defense! You can't make it no other way in this country!"

"If the fight was so fair why didn't you speak about it before? The death of Hastings has been a mystery."

"Aw, I don't blab everything I know!"

"No. Well, Curry you may consider it a fair fight, but you will hang for it if there is a law in Arizona!"

Curry smiled.

"Yeh? All right. Hang me! Come take me now!"

IT LOOKED like a stage-play where the villain hurls his defiance. Wilcox had a native disgust for "scenes." Curry was fairly rattling with six-shooters, spurs, knives, silver ornaments and all the rest of it. The boss looked weary.

"Get out!" he grunted, with impatience.

There was some further defiance from Curry, but he went, slamming the door.

It was a queer encounter from the start. Wilcox was puzzled. He was not surprised that the gun-fighter had refrained from trying murder, for few persons can shoot an unarmed man, and Curry wasn't thinking of that anyhow. He had come on a definite mission. Wilcox wondered what was behind it all.

A thunderbolt struck him two days later while he was on the range with his cattle and riders.

It came toward dusk. Off on the northern side of his dwindled herd was a commotion. Riders rushed there to find several men making away with a small drove of cattle. It was a deliberate attack, calculated to start trouble. The raiders made plenty of noise when they cut the cattle from the main herd. The angered Wilcox boys whipped out their weapons and opened fire. The others returned the fire, finally retreating after a sharp encounter.

One of the Wilcox riders was shot through the head.

He lay face downward as he had fallen from his horse and the men gathered around him silently and swore under their breaths; but as their eyes looked at the boss he saw they were shaken.

Wilcox understood. They were brave enough and loyal enough, but they were enduring too much. These episodes were coming too thickly.

The boss looked from one to the other. His voice was husky.

"Boys, I'll give it up any time you say. I can return to the ranch-house and fight it out there."

There was a long silence. The men looked at the ground.

"Not now," muttered one of them. "Not till we even the score a little."

The other men nodded. Wilcox saw they were right. As a peaceful ranch-owner he had been on the defensive from the start. It was wrong. Few wars are won by the defensive side. It may hold out, but it can never advance. The boss resolved to attack.

A few days later he sallied forth with five men, seeking trouble. He patrolled the hills and valleys of the ranch without stepping outside, for he intended to keep within the law.

On the third day they stumbled across a nondescript crowd in a gully and rode them down. The crowd was holding a palaver of some sort. The Wilcox riders surprized them completely. There was a welter of yells, shots and flying hoofs, and the crowd was scattered. Three of them were badly shot up and taken to the Wilcox ranch. Two uninjured prisoners were sent to the sheriff.

Wilcox' hurricane raid electrified the county again.

The boss had stumbled by luck on a gathering of Curry's henchmen and had captured one of Curry's best cronies. News of the raid traveled far and wide, bringing another stampede of visitors to the Wilcox ranch. Among them was George Minden, who chortled with glee and frankly announced that he would cast his lot with Wilcox.

Another visitor was Bennett of the Big Foot ranch, who arrived after dark from the range, two nights later.

"Us ranch owners has got to git together," he declared. "We never done it because we've quarreled too much and we never could pick a leader. I guess she's about time we done something."

"It is quite time," agreed Wilcox.

"I know it. We're goin' to have a meetin' right soon and we want you to come!"

There was a clatter of approaching hoofs outside. A horse thundered up to the house. Some one slammed to the ground and footsteps soon beat upon the veranda. Someone hit the door a whack and then bounced in.

It was Gennerveeve, booted, spurred, and very much excited.

"George Minden's whole ranch is burnin' down!" she yelled.

XII

IT WAS many a long mile to Three Buttes but Grant Wilcox made fast time that night. He knew something was very amiss. Steve Adams was probably in danger if not already dead.

Wilcox took Bennett and two men with him, leaving the rest to guard his own ranch. He was ready for anything.

Gennerveeve's excited story hinted at queer doings. Her father had been watching Minden's ranch for some time, she said. He expected some one to attack it. He was near there when the trouble started. There was shooting, yelling and fighting before the buildings flared up. Her father had rushed home and ordered her to ride for help. He had gone back to see the show.

Wilcox and Bennett didn't wait for the rest of it. They hastened to saddle their horses.

An hour later they galloped over a ride which in the daytime gave a clear view of the whole country. The southern and eastern range was in darkness except for occasional glints from a pale moon, but over to the north was a glare and a great pall of smoke. The dim yellow flare reflected for miles on the hillsides behind the Three Buttes ranch.

"She was right!" gulped Bennett. "Three Buttes is gone!"

The boss said nothing. He was thinking of Steve Adams.

As they drew near to the great pall of smoke they met riders traveling from far distances. The glare had been seen all over the range, even from mountain valleys fifty miles away. The whole county seemed converging into the roads that approached the old Minden ranch.

The ranch house was gone. So were barn, sheds, haystacks, bunk-house—everything. Only embers remained where once stood Minden's big house. Red sparks still played amid charred trees.

Wilcox and Bennett plunged through the smoke to where knots of men were poking into the fire. Beyond the trees were household effects lying helter-skelter on the ground. Wilcox and Bennett headed that way. The silent boss saw a cot under a dark tree some distance ahead. A figure in white could be seen bending over it.

"Steve!" said the boss.

"I'm all right," murmured the wounded man, waving a weak arm.

"Mister Minden saved him," added Daphne, giving Wilcox her hand. "It was the first thing he thought of after the shooting was over."

"Shooting?"

"Yes. We were all at dinner. A lot of yells came from the back of the house. Mister Minden and one of the men jumped up and ran to the rear door. Then a lot of men sneaked to the front. They had torches and coal-oil. They set fire to everything!"

To Wilcox it sounded like a fantastic nightmare conceived in delirium. There was fighting enough on the range, but this latest episode looked as though a lot of maniacs were loose.

"Why should they fire the house?" he puzzled.

"I don't know. Nobody knows. When Mister Minden saw the trick he was wild. He emptied his pistol at them. They ran to the barn, and set it on fire. He and the other man had to fight them alone. Every one else was away with the herds on the range.

"Did Minden hit any one?"

"I don't think so. They just set fire to everything and left. It's hard to tell what happened. Things came too quickly. I ran upstairs for Steve. Mister Minden and his man heard me calling. They came up and brought his cot down the stairway. We had a terrible time. The front of the house was ablaze and we had to fight through flame and smoke, with Steve's blankets on fire. I'm afraid it hurt Steve's lungs!"

"The devils!" exploded Bennett.

Wilcox looked at the girl. She was thinner than before and her face showed the awful strain of all she had been through. He patted her devoted shoulder.

"Where is Minden?" he asked.

"Over by the ditch. He's with Mister Potts, the editor. Mister Minden has taken it mighty hard!"

Wilcox ambled over toward the ditch where the famous gun-battle had taken place. Beyond the trees was a dark figure, splutting occasional profanity. The first terrific wave of rage had passed long ago. He was now walking up and down like a caged leopard while the editor stood beside a tree, smoking a pipe and watching him.

The boss started toward Minden. The editor held out a warning hand.

"Wilcox!" he whispered.

The boss stopped.

"Listen. Take him away from here. Take him to your ranch."

"All right, if he'll go."

Minden was easy to persuade. He shook the hand of Wilcox and later mounted a horse without comment, only asking that they go immediately. The boss made arrangements to bring Steve home next day and soon started off.

Bennett did not go with him. To the amazement of Wilcox the editor objected to Bennett's presence and so did Minden. It looked strange, almost as strange as the editor inviting himself to the Wilcox ranch again, but the silent boss let them have their way. He was used to peculiar happenings by now.

It was a queer ride over the dark plains and foot-hills that night. The three riders plodded silently onward without a sound save the pattering of horses' feet and the creaking of saddle-leather. It was half after two when they reached the ranch-house.

Wilcox lit the lamps and seated his guests in front of the fireplace in the great room, under the big oil painting. Minden, travel-worn and with grime on his face, sat forward and stared at the floor. The editor smoked nervously.

"You'll have to do it, Minden!" blurted the editor. "You might as well do it now!"

Minden nodded. The editor turned to Wilcox.

"Mister Wilcox, I've never got along with you very well, but truth is truth and you're entitled to it. Minden has something to say."

Grant Wilcox sat back and studied the tall, sandy-haired ranch-owner, his likable neighbor from the north. Minden looked thin, haggard and listless. He started to speak, halted, and started again.

"I'm the man that tried to ruin your ranch. I'm the man responsible for all the shootin', killin' and thievery on the range!"

WILCOX stiffened. He looked incredulous. Then his face became stern.

"Go on," he advised, quietly.

"I caused the killin' of Hastings. I caused the shootin' of Steve Adams. I caused your cattle to git stolen. I've caused every rotten thing that happened—me, the man that was goin' to be king of the range!"

"Go on!"

Minden's haggard eyes sought mercy. He saw a somber face and turned away, licking his lips.

"Start at the beginning," suggested the editor.

Once Minden had started he seemed determined to finish it. He appeared to want it off his chest.

"Yeh. The beginnin'. It seems like

years ago. It was when old Jim Wilcox was dyin'—dyin' like a lonely wolf here in this ranch-house. Me and Jim didn't like each other. We had trouble lots of time. So did the other ranch owners. Jim was cantankerous in his old age!"

"Go on!"

"I was foremost in the rows against him. The other cattlemen was with me. It went to my head. I figgered I was a leader. I had ambitions. I only needed a bigger ranch and more power. I begun schemin'.

"The Wilcox outfit was on the down grade. She was right alongside me. She looked easy. I tried to buy, but the price was 'way up above my head so I begun to look for short cuts. When Jim Wilcox died I thought I saw a way to bring the price within my reach. There wasn't any owner, only a lot of San Francisco lawyers lookin' for the heir. I thought I'd fix the ranch so's any one with a lick of sense would be glad to sell what was left. Then I could bring her to her feet again. I wanted the lands and ranch-house more than I even wanted the cattle.

"The only way to do it was by strippin' the ranch bare. The only way to do that was by rustlers and such folks. Oh, this may sound like a crazy man's scheme to you, Wilcox, but put yourself in my place. Here I was achin' to get hold of the best outfit in the foot-hills and there she was, layin' loose without any owner and ready to drop into my hands if I only tilted her a little!

"I knew I couldn't mix into any funny business. It had to be done by some one else. I had to be careful. The rustlers on the range was a lot of petty thieves. They wasn't big enough for what I wanted.

"Up Phoenix way I ran into a feller named Jake Curry. Curry blew in from the Rio Grande and brought some friends with him. He was the boss. I could tell it the minute I seen him. He was a feller that knew how to do things. He was the man I wanted.

"I brought Curry to the range and gave him a few cattle to start him off like a reg'lar ranchman with a registered brand. I told him what I was after, but I never gave him an order of any sort. I swear it! Whatever he's done is his business. That's my only out. It ain't much, but it's all I've got!

"Curry put his own men on the Wilcox ranch. Your old foreman, Hastings, didn't know it. Curry stole cattle right under his nose. The ranch began to shrink. I figgered it was about ripe to buy.

"Then you came. At first I didn't know how to size you up. You were so cocksure I figgered you was some tenderfoot that might as well be trimmed as not, only I wasn't quite sure. You had me guessin'. I liked you, Wilcox, but you looked as if you didn't know beans. Later, when you refused a second time to sell, I begun to see I was in a bad box.

"Curry had grown. He's grown so big I couldn't handle him. I wished I hadn't brought him onto the range. It was too late. He'd gathered every rapscallion in the county. Nobody could handle 'em except him. I begun to see what he was doin'. Curry's ambitions had mine lookin' small. He was figurin' to own everything. He ran his gangs like a gen'ral. He grabbed cattle fast and they wasn't all from the Wilcox herd, either. Some of 'em were mine!

"Oh, I'd played with fire, all right! I'd lit a match and set the range ablaze! Curry was gainin', gainin', gainin' till I wondered if anything could stop him.

"When I heard that Hastings was shot it hit me between the eyes. I knew I was guilty. I was the man that started it all. It got my nerve. Every day I wondered what was goin' to happen next and I worried myself sick.

"And then you began to fight. My ——, Wilcox, you can't know what I've been through! Every time a man was shot I seemed to see him pointin' at me! I've paced up and down in my ranch-house at night for fifty thousand miles! Sometimes I wanted to come over and tell you all about it; but I didn't have the nerve.

"Then came the round-up dance. I didn't know the fight was comin' till I heard the shots. Then I knew my devil's tricks had come home to roost.

"I staggered upstairs to my room and locked the door. I was sick as a dog—sick with knowin' I was at the bottom of it all! I got a bottle and drunk myself blind that night—and they carried the dead bodies under my window and laid 'em there without my knowin' it!

"Next mornin' I walked down among the cots in the parlor and saw Steve Adams there stiff and white. It knocked me out.

I stood there paralyzed till he moved and I was so glad he was alive that I went crazy. After that I never left Adams day or night. I had to make up for things as well as I could.

"The shootin' that night made Curry hostile. He'd lost some pals and got the worst of it. He blamed me. We had a scene behind the barn. He said he wanted damages. I was forced to give him five hundred head. He had me! He had me!

"Then came the day when you rode down some of his gang in that gulch. Curry came at me again. He said his men were losin' their nerve. He said I'd got him into this and I'd have to get him out.

"THIS time I fought back. I'd had enough. I told him he'd better quit the business because I'd quit long ago. He laughed. Have you ever seen Curry laugh? The skin on his face is too tight to stretch and laughin' hurts him. He said if I was any good I'd have made you sell out long ago. He figgered he'd try his hand and maybe you'd see the light."

"He came," nodded Wilcox.

"Yeh; but he said I'd have to put up the money and pay him mighty well for the job. I told him not to come, but he came anyhow.

"Wilcox, by this time I was a crazy man. I've never been right since Curry came onto the range. He had me. Even in the courts he'd have me. I brought him here to get your ranch and he's mighty near got mine!

"When he came back after seein' you he was mighty ornery. He said I'd have to help get rid of you. There wasn't any other way to deal with the situation. I put my foot down. I said that between him and Grant Wilcox I'd train with Wilcox. I talked to him like I'd talk to a thievin' Injun. We had a free-for-all that ended with me holdin' a gun on his head and tellin' him never to come near Three Buttes again. He went away swearin' he'd make me pay. He did, all right! It came like a flash—and Steve Adams was upstairs, burnin' to death before I knew it!"

Minden tossed up his hands.

"Say it, Wilcox. Say whatever you're thinkin'! It can't be bad enough. I've told you all I know. I told the editor about it while I was ravin' under the trees tonight. It won't be printed in the paper. It's for you to know, Wilcox, and that's all. It's a rotten story. You're a white man and I've done dirt to a white man. I admit it. Call me anything you want, Wilcox—I admit it!"

There was a queer silence. Minden might have expected a savage outburst of scorn, but none came. Wilcox merely lit a fresh cigar.

"Now you know why I didn't want Bennett to come tonight," added the broken ranchman.

The boss considered, sitting back and puffing somberly. At length there came a twinkle to his eyes.

"Minden," came his slow voice, "you have been in the wrong line of business. You were never cut out to be a rascal."

XIII

MINDEN'S confession put a new aspect on things. It answered Wilcox' old question as to why his ranch was always victimized and it explained exactly what forces he had to contend with. Incidentally it gave him control over larger properties than he had ever hoped for.

Minden was a broken man. His spirit was gone. Wilcox, the man who knew nothing about cattle—the blockhead, the drunkard, the silent stranger from San Francisco — found himself lord of two ranches and the biggest man on the range.

There was a clash yet to come with Curry. Wilcox hated to think of the coming butchery; but he set his stern lips and prepared not merely to fight but to win. The ranch was like a feudal castle in war time. There were guards at every gate.

The boss was now head of a queer collection. First was Minden. Wilcox was very gentle with him. The boss always liked Minden, but never again could he respect the man.

Another peculiar guest was the editor, full of energy and eager to get his fingers into ink again, but chary about returning to a town where the cards were stacked against him. He stayed at the ranch and chafed.

Daphne was also a guest, the most welcome of the lot. Cool, gentle, trim and fair, she brought a gracious feminine presence that helped to soothe the jarring elements into something like peace.

Steve sank very low and insisted on a wedding, so they held the ceremony in Steve's bedroom with the boss and the boys looking on. The wedding celebration consisted of a crowd of cow-punchers sitting on the porch and swearing.

But Steve grew better. Wilcox spoke freely with him on many matters.

"I'm trying to find a way out," grunted the boss, sitting beside Steve's bedside and chewing a dry cigar. "It is not a matter of winning. I will win. Men like Curry fight a losing battle. They are trying to uphold savagery in a state becoming civilized. But how am I going to drive them out without sustaining losses myself?"

"It can't be done."

"It must be done. It seems wrong that decent men should lose their lives against rogues."

"Huh! I've noticed that a rogue's six-gun throws jest as far as a Christian's!"

The boss changed the subject.

But he noticed that the Curry outfit and its allies were not so cocky as before. There were fewer attacks and the range seemed less overawed by them. There were reasons. Wilcox kept slamming them. He was growing in power. Men were flocking to enlist in his fight. Even the town, once thoroughly under the thumb of the range-riders, began to assert itself and several killings were necessary to make it knuckle under again.

Suddenly Curry decided to try for peace.

It came after Wilcox had swooped down on a little private Curry corral and manhandled a couple of men badly. Wilcox was now the attacker, going far afield. It portended ill for Curry. His leadership was in danger.

Curry arrived at the fag-end of a warm afternoon. He came at the head of a jingling, clinking cavalcade of six men picturesque with black or white "chaps," red scarfs, six-shooters, cartridge-belts, spurs, stamped leather saddles, silvered bridles, braided martingales, trailing *tapaderos* and all the equipment of range plutocrats. It was a splendid troop and excited comment—not entirely tactful—from the Wilcox men who gathered on the front porch to receive them.

"Oh, mama, look at the show!" bawled Tupper, in a raucous stage whisper. "You couldn't match them clothes an' hosses for three thousand dollars, gents! Or, take the whole outfit, for three thousand dollars an' two bits!"

But the riders held their tempers and lined up while Curry dismounted and asked for Wilcox. There was parley and ceremony on the porch. Finally Tupper entered the big room, bowed, and ushered the visitor inside.

"Your visits seem to be a habit," complained the boss to his lean-jawed visitor.

"Yeh. Well, it may be the last."

"I hope so."

"Yeh. So do I. I came to see if mebbe we couldn't fix up some sort o' peace."

"All right."

"Then it's settled."

"Certainly. You will surrender yourself to the sheriff. Return your stolen cattle. Send all your friends out of the country."

"What——?"

"Just that."

CURRY'S eyes flashed yellowish like a baffled tiger's. He stood over the table, armed and dangerous, wondering whether to kill this immovable blockhead or make him suffer some other way. The boss merely smoked. The man standing over him was nervous, cruel, untamable, crazy to find some way to overawe this quiet person in the chair, who looked somewhat bored. It was a trying situation.

"Do you want this killin' to keep up?" snarled Curry.

"No. I want it stopped."

"How? Your way?"

"There is no compromise."

"Mebbe," came Curry's trembling voice, "mebbe if I git rid of you now there won't be no more trouble!"

The boss's calm eyes met Curry's squarely.

"Possibly. You can shoot me very easily. After that you will live about one second."

The gunman knew it was true. There were shadows outside every window and behind the open rear door of the room. The Wilcox boys were taking no chances.

Curry began pacing up and down like a caged wolf.

"You're a butcher!" he snarled, turning suddenly. "All you think of is what *you* want! You don't care who's hurt!" Curry stopped and pointed a finger. "Wilcox it's on your head! Every drop o' blood on the range from now on is your fault—and believe me, there'll be plenty! Plenty!"

"You will leave the range. Even though it costs every man on this ranch, including myself."

"All right. It's on your head. Every drop!"

"I do not relish my task, but it will be done."

Curry's lips curled.

"Yeh? Well, if you're so —— cocksure, why don't you take me now, hey?" He leaned forward over the table. "Here I am. You want to turn me over to the sheriff. Why don't you do it, hey? You've got your men at the windows. Go ahead! Start it!"

"Your men are also outside. I do not want an orgy of murder on my porch."

"No. You don't. Huh! You talk a lot, but when it comes to a show-down you ain't got the guts!"

For once the boss sprang to his feet, enraged.

"Get out of here!" he thundered, pointing to the door.

There was a kick to the command, an unexpected vital force which even this gunman felt. It swept him toward the threshold before he thought about disobeying. Then he turned in surprise, hesitated, turned away with a shrug, opened the door, and slammed out.

There was an excited mobilization at the doors and windows; but it wasn't necessary. Curry stamped over the porch in a rage.

"He don't want no murder on his porch!" snorted the rustler as he vaulted into the saddle. "Huh! Come on, fellers—let's drift!"

The cavalcade started with a clatter while the Wilcox men silently watched. The riders turned the corner of the lane and loped up into the cluster of hills that rimmed the little ranch-valley. They got to the top of the ridge.

Suddenly the riders whirled their horses, drew their six-shooters, fired a quick fusillade at the house, and disappeared.

The hail of bullets came unexpectedly. One ripped into a floor planking. One went through a window and tore a glass apart. Another flicked into a window-ledge. Grant Wilcox was in the doorway at the time. A bullet snapped the cigar out of his mouth and slammed it half through the wooden panel. He pulled another cigar from his pocket and mechanically stuck it into his mouth. There was nothing heroic about it. He merely had his mind on something else.

"Get rifles!" he ordered.

The boys jumped for the weapons and then streaked for their horses. A Wilcox man on guard in the hills was blazing away in the distance. The boys soon passed him and went onward, disappearing over the ridge. Wilcox took a chair on the porch, under a honeysuckle vine. He was still there when his men returned after chasing Curry for three hours.

In all the shooting and hullabaloo nobody was hurt, but Wilcox gained enormous prestige from it. His coolness under fire was inspiring.

"He don't skeer wuth a hoot," observed Old Man Shay. "He's iron, that feller!"

The iron man had simply been trying to get the best of the other fellows. He hardly noticed the bullet that clipped his cigar. He forgot about it till next day, when it was too late to be scared.

* * *

BUT the iron man was a little bit wistful these days. He knew his wife was alive and unhappy. It tortured him. When he sold his cattle and got the money, he directed certain San Francisco persons to make discreet inquiries in Australia, but that was as far as he could go. After all she was another man's wife. The problem had to be worked out very cautiously. Some day Wilcox intended to appear in Australia, but that was for the future. He had the ranch on his hands. He could not turn away.

Minden loafed around aimlessly. He was ill at ease at the ranch-house and gradually took to the range again, keeping near his men and cattle. On a solitary trip toward the range he happened to pass by Yellow Valley. Jasper Tibbs and his son were away. Gennerveeve gave him lunch and he sat brooding at the makeshift table in the cool, dark adobe house.

A shadow fell across the sunny doorstep. Spurred boots thumped on the threshold. Minden turned casually. Then he jumped.

"Curry!" he gasped.

Curry peered into the semi-gloom inside. "Oh, it's you, is it?"

"What do you want?"

"Nothin'. I was jest passin' by. I don't want no dealin's with a yaller-livered skunk! Turned right over to the other side, didn't you? Body, boots and britches! I reckon you're jest plain dog-meat!"

Minden's face was white as his hand slipped to his forty-five.

"That'll be all from you! Get out of here!"

"Take yer hand off that gun! Take it off! Don't you try to draw on me! I'll plug you before you move!"

"Hey!" yelled Gennerveeve, in alarm.

"Shut up!" snapped Curry.

The trembling hostess leaped to the cradle, grabbed her baby, and crouched down behind the big stove, the only solid thing in the room. She didn't know what was coming, but she believed in safety first.

"Quit it!" she pleaded. "If you gotta fight, go outside!"

"I don't want to fight," said Minden. "Not unless I have to. And then ——"

"Yeh? Well, you'll either fight or make good!" Curry's voice suddenly exploded. "You got me into this, now git me out! You got me here! You started it! Now you run yawpin' to Wilcox with yer tail between yer legs! You started this—now finish it or I'll finish you!"

"You burned my house!" accused Minden.

"I'll burn yer hide, too!"

"Yeh? Try it!"

"I'm li'ble to-unless you straighten out!"

"Straighten, hey? What's your proposition? Say it quick!"

"Get Wilcox. Smash him. Get him before he gits us!"

"Us? Do you think I'm in with you?"

"You ain't got no choice. You been in since the first!"

"Well, I'm out! I ain't a crook. I ain't a rustler. I ain't a house burner. I ain't a murderer! I'm through with you—through long ago! You went your own pace and now you'll keep it!"

The two men were very close. Curry's scornful passions were rising. Minden was white-faced but ready. Gennerveeve cowered behind the stove and began to whimper.

"Minden," yelled Curry, "you're dog-meat! Dog-meat!"

The fist of Minden lashed out wildly. He wanted to pulverize that tight, cynical face and crush it to bits. The blow struck Curry's nose. It staggered him. His right hand went downward.

Minden leaped. He grabbed Curry's wrist with both hands before that deadly gun could spring from its holster. He twisted the wrist savagely. With a yelp of pain and rage Curry let go of the gun-butt. The thing clattered across the room.

Now it was Curry's turn. His left hand was free. He slipped it to Minden's hip. Minden saw it just in time. The gun was jerked out of the holster, but he grabbed Curry's wrist again with both hands. The gun-muzzle was shoved further away from Minden's side. Curry's face glistened with sweat as he strained with the one arm to offset the pressure of two. It couldn't be done. Curry dropped the pistol and lashed out with his free hand. The crunch of the blow cracked through the room. Minden seemed indifferent to it.

Then began a battle that ripped the insides of the little old adobe house to pieces, while the poor little Missouri girl cowered behind the stove with her baby.

THE battlers had forgotten their guns now. It was fist, boot, tooth and nail. They kicked the table over with their whirling boots. They smashed cutlery and dishes. They rolled on the floor. They hammered, tore, gouged and bit. Their livid faces changed form under the battering but they fought on.

Minden tried to reach one of the guns on the floor. He stretched an arm out. Curry bent it backward. Wild with pain, Minden gouged at his eyes. Curry freed the pinioned arm and snarled like a wounded animal, battering with his fists. Minden's fingers closed about his throat. Half-throttled, Curry tried to draw back.

They arose to their feet, struggling and snarling. They wrestled and panted. They slammed into the baby's cot with a crash. Minden's fingers held like steel. Curry's fists worked furiously but the fingers held.

The crib was shattered. Curry's hand touched its heavy side-board, one inch thick. His frantic fingers ripped it away from the rest of the wood. He swung it viciously. The cruel edge of the board struck Minden's head. Minden's fingers relaxed. Curry struck again. And again. And again. It was slam, slam, slam, slam, slam. Minden subsided a little more with each ferocious blow. Curry arose to his knees and kept battering. He was wild, savage, frantic with fighting lust.

Finally Curry arose, panting and disheveled, with his face a red ruin and his clothes ripped apart.

He stood with braced feet and gulped for breath. He was a horrible apparition. He glowered like a demoniac gorilla till his brain cleared. Then he bent over Minden, turned away, picked up his six-shooter and strode out to the pump. He didn't notice Gennerveeve. He forgot all about her.

The girl laid her babe on the floor and staggered to her feet. Whimpering softly, she looked around like a dazed child, aghast at the wreckage of her home. She noticed her father's shotgun on the wall. It gave her a hazy idea. She pulled it down and turned her wabbly steps toward the little front window, laying the barrel on the sill.

Curry had mounted. He was riding away without a backward glance. The muzzle of the shotgun pointed unsteadily at his body. Gennerveeve tried to pull back its hammer, but she couldn't. She just couldn't screw up the nerve.

And so Curry rode over the hill and far away, with the muzzle of a useless shotgun waving at him out of the window.

Behind the shotgun was a crying little girl and behind the girl, in a dark corner, lay the crushed, crumpled body of a man who once had great ambitions.

XIV

WHEN a breathless Gennerveeve brought the news of Minden's death to the Wilcox ranch the boss notified the sheriff and prepared for more trouble. Wilcox rightly assumed that Curry was now a worse menace than ever before. A beaten scoundrel with his back to the wall is likely to perform prodigies through sheer desperation. The history of the Southwest is full of such incidents.

The task of Wilcox was made harder by the coming of Summer, bringing a heat that made men squirm and causing range-cattle to spread out farther in search of feed. The Winter had been wet and there was no danger of drought, but now the animals scattered far afield until often a half-mile separated one steer from the next. Guarding such a far-flung herd was next to impossible.

Incidentally Wilcox had general charge over the Minden herds till something could be done about settling Minden's estate.

"From what I know about this country we're lucky at that," said Steve Adams, who was taking short journeys in the saddle. "Some folks have to send their stock to California in Summer."

"We are lucky that way," grunted the boss. "Have you heard any news from the range lately?"

Steve's brow wrinkled.

"I get rumors but that's all. We may be losin' cattle every day but the Lord knows how many."

"Curry will steal now for pure malice."

"Yes, but it's not Curry alone now. I hear everybody's gettin' into it. Seems like some one's seen Jim Kelly prowlin' around with Curry. Kelly's jest as big as Curry. He's got as many men. Then folks are sayin' Bonner and Vance are gettin' ready for somethin'. It looks like you've scared 'em into gettin' together. Instead of bustin' 'em you've made 'em drop their quarrels. Curry's set up a big yell for help."

"In other words, I'll have an avalanche of them."

"It looks like it."

"What would you suggest that I do?"

"Fight."

The boss nodded.

But it was not so easy. Curry was hard to catch and the rumors about the other rogues seemed only thin air.

The sheriff soon arrived to make an investigation. He admitted he didn't have much time for Curry.

"I've got six other cases," he said. "Every one of 'em's as bad as this Minden murder and some of 'em's wuss. If I go skallyhootin' after Curry I'll need sixty days and a dozen men. I ain't got 'em to spare."

The investigation was soon over. The sheriff pumped Gennerveeve and went to the scene of the murder, after which he went to town again, taking a lot of written testimony and nothing else. As for clearing the range, he was pessimistic.

"This yere's a hole-in-the-wall country," he opined. "As soon as you git one gang, two or three others come in. I shore admire your nerve, Mister Wilcox, but you've grabbed off the hottest job in the county. I reckon she's too hot for any man!"

Wilcox also had another burden of woe to carry. Gennerveeve had come to grace the ranch-house with her presence.

After the tragedy in Yellow Valley she couldn't stay in the old adobe house, so she picked up her baby and made for the Wilcox ranch, where she had two weeks of nervous prostration and sobbing fits. The boss bore it patiently, but sometimes when Gennerveeve screeched and burst into tears over the breakfast table his cigars were badly chewed up for the rest of the morning.

Wilcox spent most of his time on the range, where Steve was both foreman and teacher. Steve's ranch work was well done. It left the boss plenty of time to plot his campaigns and hold down the lid at the ranch-house. Wilcox was grateful.

"Steve," he said, one day when about to start for home from the range, "when conditions are clearer I am going to need a younger partner. You are the man I want."

Wilcox rode away and prevented any reply, but in the back of his head was a thought even more important than Steve Adams.

Perhaps some day he could center his life in the old ranch-house with the bride of his youth beside him, leaving the management on younger shoulders. And perhaps behind this he had thoughts of working outward from the ranch—even to the State Legislature and beyond. But that was for the future.

HE ARRIVED at the ranch-house an hour after sunset. He found the front room dark and lit the lamp at the long table. The light fell on two envelopes, one white and addressed with a pencil-scrawl, the other yellow and bearing a stamp.

Wilcox opened the white one first. A piece of paper dropped out and he read a highly amazing announcement:

> "Plese excus handritig. Me and Mr. Tuper have gone away to get marred. Genaveve."

It gave him a jolt. He smoked like a fire-engine. Then his eyes twinkled and he picked up the yellow envelope. It was from a San Francisco friend who had kept in touch with Australia. The message was brief, but it made Wilcox's stoical face change color:

> "Blum drowned while being pursued by Australian police after a barroom riot. Body found and identified. I await your instructions."

The boss sank into his chair. Later he wrote instructions. Voluminously.

There was a new light on his grim face when Daphne Adams happened in later and found him writing. As he glanced up, his thoughtful eyes seemed radiant; but he gravely handed her the white paper.

"What does this mean?"

She read it with mixed emotions.

"They must have gone four hours ago. That was when Mister Tupper rode up, but I didn't know he intended this!"

"Did you know they were friendly?"

"Very. They have been together most of the time. Let me see. It started when she first came here. He began to apologize about something. I don't know what it was, but she forgave him. They've been very friendly ever since."

"I know what it was," grunted the boss. "Now what will her father say? He hates Tupper."

Wilcox sent a courier to summon Tibbs. The father arrived next evening and the news was broken.

Jasper Tibbs raved and tore his hair. The lank Missourian wanted blood. He waved his bony arms and cried to high Heaven.

"Him!" shrieked Tibbs. "My ——, Mister Wilcox! Us Tibbses was allus keerful who we 'sociated with and now we've got a shufflin', yawpin', no-'count, big-mouth slob right in the middle of our fambly! My ——! Gimme a gun—gimme a hoss! I'll blow his ornery head off!"

"He may make good," suggested the boss. "Give him a chance."

It made Tibbs sizzle. He almost frothed at the mouth. It took nearly an hour to calm him, and then he exploded again every so often.

"He's no good!" exclaimed the irate father, suddenly. "If it wasn't for that meetin' Friday I'd go to town an' bust him apart!"

"What meeting?"

"Curry an' Kelly an' Vance an' a hull passel of 'em holds a big pow-wow in Deep Valley Friday afternoon. They're a-goin' to find what to do with ye. I'll be thar an' tell ye what happens. If 'twa'n't for that I'd go to town an' bust that no-'count Tupper to pieces! I'll lick that triflin' Gennerveeve till she yells bloody murder!"

"What do these Curry friends propose to do?" insisted Wilcox.

"I dunno. I reckon they aim to snow ye under."

"Oh."

The boss saw he was now facing frightful odds. He forgot about Tupper and Gennerveeve. His mind concentrated on the main problem of survival.

"Go back to your home," he ordered Tibbs. "Learn what you can, but do not be in Deep Valley Friday. Do you understand?"

"Why shouldn't I go there? Don't ye want to know what happens?"

"No. I only want you to be out of it."

"Then I'll go look for Tupper!"

"Go back to your ranch!" snapped the boss.

The outraged father went.

Wilcox felt as though an avalanche were poised above his head and ready to launch itself upon him at any time. He knew he had come to the great crisis of his life. But instead of showing trepidation he showed action.

Tibbs's visit was on a Tuesday night. Before midnight couriers were riding east, west, north and south.

Two evenings later, silent troops of armed horsemen arrived and pitched camp in the alfalfa patch in front of the ranch garden. Foremen went into the house and held conference with the quiet, bearded man behind the long table. So did ranch-owners and citizens from the town.

That night a great cattleman's association was formed. The men were ready for it and they had only needed a meeting to bring it about. The time was ripe. Some of the greatest ranches in Arizona were welded that night into a protective alliance which was to make its power felt.

The man chosen to head the new organization was the silent sea-captain from San Francisco.

XV

WILCOX marshaled his hosts next morning. He counted fifty armed men, well mounted and well equipped. Some had come long distances, arriving just before daybreak, but they were all ready and eager for the word to start. Wilcox gave the order at mid-morning.

"It's smash or be smashed this time!" he grunted, as he swung into the saddle.

He was confident that range gossip had not learned of the mobilization, but he had told no one his plans anyhow. His movements had been fast and secret.

The ranchmen rode in a solid column. Scouts were thrown out in every direction. The column took a circuitous route through the foothills, keeping out of sight from the plains. Deep Valley was thirty miles away to the northward, just at the edge of the flat lands. It was barren of vegetation and bounded by steep hills clustered with rocks and boulders.

Steve Adams rode with two scouts far in advance of Wilcox. He arrived at the last hill from Deep Valley. Suspecting that Curry might have posted guards, Steve and his companions left their horses in a gully and slipped up among the boulders of the hill. They found a man sitting on a boulder, smoking a cigaret and holding a rifle across his knees.

The man was thrown, gagged and bound before he realized what had happened.

Steve then walked cautiously to the edge of the hilltop and peered downward. Below was the brown floor of the valley, fairly alive with armed men, some sitting in a circle and some loafing around aimlessly. One quartet sat with a deck of cards between its members. Beyond these, under the brow of the opposite hill, were horses galore—brown, white, black and pinto, with reins sagging from their bits, ready for travel at any time.

"Everybody's here!" exclaimed Steve. "Look—there's Curry, Bonner, Vance, Kelly, Indian Billy, Black Murray—everybody! It's a round-up! It's the biggest pow-wow since the Apaches were caught!"

Steve sent a man back to inform the boss of everything. Within a half-hour Wilcox and his ranchmen had arrived at the rear gully, dismounted, and climbed up among the boulders. Wilcox and Bennett were soon peering down upon the unsuspecting crowd in the valley—a force even larger than their own.

The ranchers took station quietly behind rocks. There was the rattle of rifles unslung and the glint of six-shooters flicking from their holsters.

"They's shore a-goin' to be trouble poppin' around yere!" prophesied Jasper Tibbs, leaning on a rifle alongside the boss.

"Not for us!" grunted Wilcox.

"They'll be pow'ful ornery!" demurred Tibbs.

"No. Look around you."

Tibbs looked. Below him stretched the deep brown valley, running east and west, with only one narrow outlet to the eastward leading toward the range. Wilcox and his friends were on the northern hill, but most of their men were massed above the single outlet.

The trap was perfect except that the opposite hill was bare.

Suddenly a bit of color moved toward the yellowish top of the other hill. The ranchmen stared. Then they arose with one accord and stood astonished. It was the red-and-white guerdon of a cavalry troop! Then came another, and another, and still another, floating above a solid line of blue figures and brown horses!

"Well, I'll be darned," said Bennett, rubbing his eyes.

The blue-clad figures crowded to the top of the hill, a solid phalanx. An officer held up his arm. A bugle sounded. The horses stopped and the troops dismounted while the sun flashed on the steel of their sabers.

Curry and the men in the valley heard the bugle. They looked up and saw the ranchmen massed above them. There was an instant of hesitation and then the valley was seething with action. Some of the men dashed for their horses. Some whipped out their six-shooters and fired up at the ranchmen. They had not yet seen the cavalry because of the hill-slope, but they saw the ranchers. Bullets began to whip into the rocks.

"Start it!" commanded Wilcox.

THERE was a crash of rifles. Flashes of flame spat from the hill and a cloud of powder-smoke arose. Figures in the valley dropped. Others spurred their horses in a mad ride toward the gap that led to the plains and freedom.

That was what Wilcox had expected.

Nearly half his men were stationed above that exit. Their rifles and pistols could throw a veritable barrier of lead across the gap, through which no living thing could pass.

With a signal Wilcox closed the gate.

There was a sheet of flame and a crackle of gunfire from the hill. The leading horseman galloped into the path of lead and hurtled to the ground with his horse. Those behind him spurred onward. They met the deadly barrier of bullets from the hillside. The charging horses and riders melted into a writhing, clutching, kicking, sprawling mass and others slammed into them. One animal turned a complete somersault.

"It's murder!" gasped Steve Adams.

"Better than having them murder us," grunted the boss.

The riders in the valley could not meet the terrific punishment. They turned back. It did them no good. Lead spat at them from behind every rock. They fired back desperately, but they were soon milling around in frantic circles. Some got behind horses.

"They're weakening," said Bennett.

Wilcox was thinking of John Hastings, George Minden and all the bloody history of the range.

"Let them surrender, then!"

But the men below did not surrender easily. Many of them saw the bars of the penitentiary looming before their eyes. Others saw the gallows. They kept fighting stubbornly.

Wilcox kept smoking and watched the smoky battle from his vantage-point on top of a boulder. The editor rushed up with a smoking pistol in his hand. He was tasting sweet revenge and his eyes were alight.

"What's the matter with those fool soldiers?" he demanded. "They're not doing anything. When do they start?"

"They are not going to start. Not unless they are fired upon. They are spectators."

"Wha-what?"

"They came for a ride."

The editor looked as if his brain were reeling.

"You—you mean to say they're not going to do anything?"

"No. They have no authority."

"Then what are they here for? Curry can walk right through them!"

"He can, but he will never know it."

"He'll soon learn!"

"I doubt it. Curry is an outlaw. He has a bad conscience. He will hardly walk up to a troop of federal cavalry. Watch!"

It was true. Some of the stubborn men in the valley began climbing the opposite hill, targets for every rifle borne by the ranchmen. The latter slackened fire and let them go. The hunted men toiled up the slope and came to a point where they saw the line of troopers.

They halted and put up their hands.

Down at the end of the valley a horseman still tried to rush the pass, but a quick volley ended it. The crowd dropped weapons and surrendered. They were trapped and crushed. The round-up was complete.

The ranchman by twos and threes started for the valley with Wilcox in the lead.

The valley was a sight. Dejected cowpunchers stood amid shattered horses and prone men. Down toward the pass was a welter of horses and riders who had tried to cross the barrier. Bullet and hoof had done their work. It was a holocaust.

The ranchmen ringed their prisoners with a wall of armed men. The range-riders huddled together. In the center of the mass was Curry, whose forehead was red from the crease of a bullet. He swaggered forward.

"I reckon it's me you want!" he announced.

"I want all of you," grunted Wilcox.

"You ain't got no reason to hold these other fellers!"

"We will let the courts decide that. There are charges against nearly all of them."

THE men took Curry and bound his hands, later attending to the others. Wounded men were tended and two suffering horses were shot. Most of the range-riders were wounded, and there were six who would never rise again.

Curry watched proceedings with a sarcastic smile.

"Just what are you goin' to do with me?" he questioned. "Do you think you're the law of the state, Wilcox?"

"No. You will meet the law of the state later. You will answer for the murders of John Hastings and George Minden. I think there are other charges also."

Curry seemed to awaken and realize his plight. He strained at his bonds.

"You'll never hang me!" he shouted. "I'll kill myself first!"

Wilcox turned on his heel indifferently. His pity went to Hastings, Minden and all the men Curry had harmed.

A cavalry officer on a big bay charger rode down the hill at the head of several officers. He waved a gloved hand to Wilcox.

"We had a good practise-ride, captain!" he chuckled. "Your tactics were perfect! I have never seen anything better!"

"Thanks," said Wilcox, embarrassed.

The editor rushed up and grabbed his arm. The editor was itching to get his fingers into ink again. He was thrilled with dramatic fervor.

"Strike!" he pleaded. "Strike while the iron is hot! Strike now! Move on the town! Clean it up! Scatter the crooks! Start now while you're organized!"

Wilcox looked around him. The cattlemen were watching him, ready to take his orders, giving him recognition as their leader and forming a compact force under his hand. The quiet stranger from the cities—the drunkard, the woodenhead, the target for editorial jibes—was the supreme power on the range.

The quiet boss for once agreed with the editor.

"Back to the horses. Start for town!"

THE taming of the town was a simple matter and almost without dramatics. Certain persons left hurriedly and the decent element took charge. The town's worst citizens were gone anyhow.

Curry and his allies were turned over to a startled sheriff who could hardly believe his eyes. At first the prisoners were herded into the small jail and guarded by a big posse; but after the courts muddled through the long processes of justice the prisoners were scattered. Some went free, some went to the penitentiary, a few even escaped; but they never appeared on the range again.

By the time the courts were through, new conditions had dawned on the range and their heyday was over. Those who were finally freed had lost nerve and prestige. Curry and some of the others paid the extreme penalty.

With the gangs paralyzed forever, Wilcox returned to his ranch-house and took up his quiet life, waiting patiently for the mistress of his domain. He had only one war to quell now, and that was the strife between Tupper and his new father-in-law. Tupper finally gained a sour benediction and peace reigned.

Came a day when a faded little woman stepped off an overland train. Wilcox went to town that day in a buckboard, unaccompanied. He wanted no audience. This was his day and his alone.

Next morning, before the sunshine grew hot, they started on the long ride toward home, over hill and valley and plain, with the clear air fanning their cheeks and a well-matched team thrusting the miles behind them. There was much to be said. The ride was all too short.

Finally they came to the rim of the hills that rose over the ranch valley. The boss reined in.

The little woman looked downward with lips parted and eyes radiant. Above them was the clear blue sky of mid-morning. Below them was the little green valley with its white barns, yellow haystacks, shady trees and well-kept gardens. Among the honeysuckle vines of the ranch-house porch sat a little collection of men and two young women, waiting to welcome the new arrival.

"Home!" she cried with moistening eyes. "Our home! How inviting it looks! If you only knew the strife and clamor and trouble of the past year and could see it with my eyes! If you only knew how it feels to be freed from anguish and come to a place like this! Oh, Captain, my Captain, our fate has been kind to us!"

There was a twinkle in the boss's eyes as he, too, looked down on the green fields.

"Yes. It's a peaceful country."

THE PICTURE*

by Frederick Moore

Author of "A Bit of Local Color"

THERE was an air of quiet excitement in the Shipmasters' Club that morning when I wandered into the place to escape the blinding heat of the Manila water-front. I found fully a dozen men crowding about a little table, those on the outside of the circle craning their necks to look over the shoulders of those who were staring at some object which I could not see.

They paid no attention to my entrance, except to look up hastily as the door opened, and then turn their attention once more to the table. Masters and mates, customs brokers, ship-chandlers' runners, shipping agents and stevedores—all gazed in fascination at something, while awed whispers came from the inner circle.

I pushed my way into the throng and caught a glimpse of a dirty sheet of paper on which had been drawn with pencil some faint lines and curves. From where I stood I could not see that it had any meaning.

Just as I was about to make inquiry as to what it was all about, there came a startled whisper of alarm—

"Here he is!"

I turned to see Captain Gibbins of the schooner *Bangor Maid* standing in the doorway, frowning in upon the group about the table.

The crowd broke and scattered about the room, leaving the paper which had held the attention of all of them, spread out upon the bare board. At once a dozen conversations began—talk about nothing in particular, talk invented to cover the sudden and unexpected arrival of Gibbins, and to lead him to believe that after all they

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had no interest in the paper on the table.

Gibbins stood in the doorway for a full minute without moving, like a ship hung in stays. His eyes were fastened upon the paper, and his face was screwed up in a puzzled way, though I could see that he was displeased. He was wearing a white suit which looked too big for him, and the square-cut coat flared away in front rather untidily and revealed the front of his tawny pongee shirt. He had on a floppy straw hat with a wide limp brim. His gray eyes were enclosed by sun-squints, his cheeks and jaws were well browned by tropical tan, and his face was deeply seamed with many wrinkles. But for all the grimness of his face, there was something likable about the man.

He was only forty or so, though the peering, near-sighted look of his eyes made him appear older at first glance. And the worn expression of his face, as if he had been under great strain and had lost much sleep, added to this impression of age beyond his years. For all his expression of displeasure, there was something about his face which suggested a smile—as if he would like to smile, but couldn't.

He moved forward slowly, and approaching the table, picked up the paper and looked at it. He crumpled it swiftly in his powerful hand, made a movement as if he would cast it on the floor, and thrust it into the side pocket of his coat. Then he sat down at the table and beckoned the China boy to him, ordered a bottle of Isuan water, and stared at the wall ahead.

No one spoke to him. He might have been a stranger in the place, yet I knew nearly every man in the club had a speaking acquaintance with him. But he showed no resentment at thus being ignored; rather, he seemed well pleased that no one bothered him with conversation. He seemed to be utterly weary and was content to be left to himself.

Many of the men who had been looking at the paper got out of the room on various pretexts. I dropped into a grass chair and picked up a newspaper, pretending to read. But I was watching Gibbins. He took off his hat and revealed his black hair, moist and uncombed, clamped down over his forehead. But he did not brush away the hair, though he moved his hand as if he were about to do so, and then made a peculiar movement as if he were thrusting aside something which interfered with his vision.

When he had finished his Isuan he scribbled a chit for the bar-boy, gave him a peseta, and strode out through the open door. There were four of us about the reading-table and we all lifted our heads and listened to Gibbins clumping down the stone steps to the embankment along the Pasig.

Some of the men who had left when Gibbins entered now returned and began a card-game in a far corner of the room. It was evident that they had waited outside till they were sure Gibbins had gone.

ONE of the men near me was Fearoyd, second-mate in the steamer *Taming*. He was figuring something on an old magazine with a stub of a pencil.

"Was that Captain Gibbins who went out?" I asked Fearoyd.

"You know blasted well that was Gibbins!" snapped Fearoyd, and put his pencil back in his mouth while he studied the problem he was working at. But he looked over his shoulder at the door before he answered me, and his voice was low and cautious in spite of his pretended show of temper.

"Now look here, Fearoyd," I began, letting my feet down to the floor and throwing the newspaper across my knees, "I've known you too long—and too well—to have you come any top-gallant manners with me when I ask you a question. I thought that that was Captain Gibbins, but I wanted to make sure."

"Gibbins, master of the *Bangor Maid*—and owner," mumbled Fearoyd through his pencil. I waited till he had finished with another column of figures and then I determined to have it out with him.

"What's the matter with Gibbins?" I demanded. "He comes in here and everybody scuttles for cover as if he were a pariah. What's all this whispering and mystery?" I noticed that the card-players looked crossly in my direction as if I had broached a subject which was tabu, but I pretended not to see their hint of annoyance.

"Nothing's the matter with Gibbins," said Fearoyd, and the card-players exchanged glances of satisfaction, as if Fearoyd had settled me and they could go on with their game.

"You know perfectly well there's something wrong with Gibbins, so don't try to blind my eye," I retorted. "He comes in here and nobody speaks to him. I've tried to find out something about this business before, but everybody brails up their lip when I mention his name, or changes the subject. And what was that paper they were all looking at—the paper that Gibbins grabbed up and pocketed?"

"Four and six is ten, carry the one and set down the naught," droned Fearoyd, and shook his pencil irritably, wholly disregarding what I had said.

"That's the picture he draws," said a voice behind my left shoulder, and I turned to see a thin little man in a chair—a man whose name I didn't know; but I recognized him as a runner for a ship-chandler, who had a shop on the Mole. The little man wore glasses and a white collar that was badly wilted and he had sparse reddish hair that matched a wispish little red mustache.

"What picture does he draw?" I asked.

The little man grinned and his face colored. He probably wished he hadn't spoken, for the card-players scowled at him.

"Gibbins draws what picture?" I demanded.

"I don't know—a picture of the coast—somewhere——"

"Belay that!" came a rough voice from the card-table, and though I looked down that way I could not tell who had spoken. The players were all making a point of attending closely to their hands.

The little man giggled nervously, as if he knew a joke at my expense, and stood up.

"I'll have to be sliding along," he said, and got under way promptly and was out through the door before I realized that he was gone.

"Fearoyd," I began again, "What was that third cook of a Norwegian brig who calls himself a ship-chandler's runner talking about? About what Gibbins draws? Is it a confounded secret? If it is, I'll keep off it, but I'm tired of having all hands and the fiddler's son run away from me when I try to talk about Gibbins. I've been out in these waters two years, and as to this club, I pay my way in it. But I'll not come near the place if I can't ask an honest question and get an honest answer to——"

"Wilks, I don't want to talk about it," said Fearoyd, and gave me a look which I knew to be cautionary.

"Very well, then," I said crossly, threw my feet up on the chair again and stuck the newspaper up before me to let them all know they could go to the —— in a half less three at high water. And to my great surprize within ten minutes the card-players were gone, and Fearoyd and myself had the place alone. Fearoyd had by this time finished his confounded figuring and was sulking over his glass of San Miguel.

"Why did everybody go hard aground with me because I asked about Gibbins?" I enquired, throwing my newspaper away and willing Fearoyd should understand that I was still as mad as a cross-eyed bo'sun's mate with a boil on his neck.

Fearoyd wiped his mouth with the back of his hand in that same slow and lazy fashion that has kept him second in a Hong Kong boat for years.

"WELL," he began, looking into his glass to keep off my eye, "we're all sorry for him and we don't like to talk about him—for his own good. He's getting so that he won't be able to get insurance if the underwriters' agents get the truth about what's going on. It's not for me——"

He shut up again on the pretext that the China boy came drifting over our way with a rag to look after some of the brightwork.

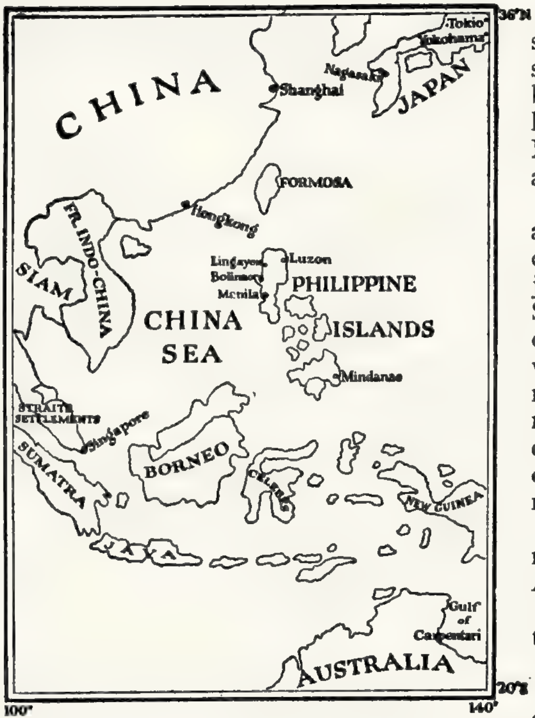
"Oh, go on, Fearoyd," I scolded. "It's the likes of you that keeps me asking questions, when if I knew what it was all about I could keep still and not be driving folks away from the club. I'm not an underwriter and I know how to keep my jib close-hauled about any man's ill-luck."

"It's because Gibbins has had five mates, more or less, in the last six months, for one thing," Fearoyd began again. "They like him well enough as master, but he gives them the creeps. The trouble is they think he's gone off his head. He's always drawing that picture of his."

"What picture?"

"Just some palm-trees and a rock on a shore-line. That was one of 'em they were all looking at when Gibbins came in. Sollars, his last mate—just quit him—left it here."

"What damage does it do a man to draw a picture of some palm-trees and a rock on a shore-line?" I asked.



"He keeps doing it—Gibbins—and acts queer."

"Queer? How queer?" I pressed.

"I don't know. That's what his mates say. They can't explain it. It's the *way* he draws they don't like—the same picture over and over again, rough like, with a pencil."

"And they say a man's crazy because he draws a picture?"

"But—he doesn't know when he's going to draw it, that's the trouble," said Fearoyd. "And the worst of it"—he lowered his voice—"he's never seen the place he draws—that spot with the palm-trees—nor nobody else has ever seen such a place."

"What do you mean? He doesn't know when he's going to draw it?" I demanded. "Do you mean to tell me that Gibbins doesn't know what he's doing?"

"That's what the mates say. He gets a pencil in his hand, and the —— pencil just makes the picture—a rough sketch, but plain enough. It's in the night it comes on, they say—he wakes up in the night at sea and draws, and looks wild and talks wild."

"I'll admit it is queer," I said.

"You see," resumed Fearoyd, warming up now that he had caught my attitude, "it's so much worse because of what happened out here some eight years back. The ship *Creole Queen* foundered in a typhoon somewhere on the Zambales coast. Gibbins was out here at the time, mate in a home ship. He was going to marry Allie Nessler, daughter of old Cap'n Nessler—and she was lost with her father in the *Creole*.

"Gibbins had bought his duds and had arranged for a parson, and the coming Sunday he was to marry the Nessler girl. The jimmycane swept along here, and come Sunday the *Creole Queen* was two days overdue. Gibbins hung around all dressed up waiting for the *Creole* to come in—but there never was a stick found out of her. She must have been somewhere off the Zambales coast when the typhoon struck—and it's only off the Zambales coast that Gibbins makes his pictures." Fearoyd shivered.

"I see—the Zambales coast. Gibbins runs up and down there with the *Bangor Maid*," I remarked.

"Yes, he's got a contract to carry hay for the government to a calvary post in Lingayen Gulf—took the contract cheap so he could be in those waters. He's just come down from there in ballast, and the word went out this morning that his mate, Sollars, has quit him—got out of the schooner the minute she was inside the breakwater, and handed out the picture they were all looking at when Gibbins came in.

"That's what Gibbins is doing round here—looking for a mate. That's why we all keep still. We want him to get a mate—if he doesn't he'll lose his insurance. Sollars says Gibbins is—well, Sollars is done for the same reason the others quit—this business of the pictures."

"That's all twaddle!" I snorted. "Just sailormen's fool superstitions! They're all making a lot out of nothing!"

"Then you ship with Gibbins," said Fearoyd. "You may not think much of it, but Sollars is scared—and he's no fool. The last I saw of him he was in the Flagship Bar getting himself pickled so he can forget it all and get himself on an even keel again. He's jumpy—if you run into him, better not talk to him about it."

"Do you believe all this?" I asked.

"No—nobody believes it," said Fearoyd. "That's what makes 'em all so mad when somebody begins to talk about it. But they all cleared out when you began to ask questions. I tell you, Wilks, it's not a popular subject to bring up around here."

"No! They don't believe it!" I sneered. "But they're all ready to run for cover at a mention of Gibbins or his drawing. And they were all keen at it round the table when I came in. The truth is they believe it so much that they're all——"

I stopped. Captain Gibbins stood in the doorway.

HE CAME in without looking at us and sat down at the table. The China boy brought a fresh bottle of Isuan water, and Fearoyd muttered something about having to get away somewhere, and got out. I picked up my newspaper and pretended to read.

Gibbins drank his mineral water and sat staring at the wall. Presently he got up and inspected the blackboard where the names of men who wanted ships were listed. I knew there were three names there—one of them mine.

"Do you happen to know where I can get a mate?" he asked me. I was startled by his voice, and looked up to see him staring at me. There was something pathetic in his tone and attitude—a suggestion of utter loneliness and a knowledge that though he frequented the haunts of other men, he was only tolerated.

"What rig?" I asked, pretending that I did not know him. The expression of his face changed, as if at last he had found somebody who was not going to run from him—he almost smiled.

"Schooner," he said, and then with something of desperation, as if he might as well have it done with, added—"*Bangor Maid*—I own her—my name is Gibbins."

"My name is Wilks, sir," I said. "You'll find it on the board there. I've been laid up with fever a couple of months, but I'll go mate with you if you think I look fit."

He seemed surprized at my readiness to ship with him, and opened his mouth to speak, but checked the words. I rather expected he was going to explain that several mates had left him, but he said nothing. He gave me a close scrutiny, and with some abruptness moved toward the door.

"Meet me at the customs house at noon, sharp—Mr. Wilks. You might get your dunnage aboard—she's lying off the transport dock at the breakwater, loading hay for Camp Wallace in the Lingayen Gulf."

Gibbins hurried away, as if he feared some one might come in, and, discovering that I had shipped in the *Bangor Maid*, attempt to dissuade me. So I got my sea-kit aboard the schooner by sending it out with a government launch, and was at the customs house at noon. I found Captain Gibbins in the commissioner's room.

"You showed up on time," he remarked, and I thought he was a trifle surprized at seeing me there.

"I keep my word, sir," I said, and handed over my papers. He looked at them casually and laid them down on the bar-desk.

"I thought you might want to change your mind, Mr. Wilks," and he squinted a gray eye at me with a trace of a twinkle. I knew he was fishing to find out if anybody had told me about him.

"I'm not easily influenced," I said, and he gave me another close look.

"And I'm not over-popular," he said. "I'd rather you'd have some idea of what you're——"

"What I've heard about you, Captain Gibbins, is good enough for me."

"Then somebody has—talked to you?" he asked.

"I've heard some gossip, but my dunnage is aboard, sir."

"Good!" he said. "I feel better about taking you, now that you've heard—a few things. You're the man I want, Mr. Wilks—you've got the proper spirit," and he thrust out a hand to me. I shook it, and without more ado we finished up the business and went aboard the *Bangor Maid*.

I MADE two trips with Gibbins—and nothing out of the ordinary happened. He was a quiet man and kept to himself a good deal, reading in his cabin, mostly. Being the only white men on board, there were times when it was dull. But being a great reader myself I rather enjoyed the quiet of the schooner, for I had been in a liner several years and was tired of having a mob of passengers about the decks.

On the third passage to Camp Wallace I discovered that our compass was cranky. I never had trusted it, for it had a big bubble and was old-fashioned. I had tinkered around with azimuths, amplitudes and lines of position and found the compass good enough. And the deviation-card was correct. There was surprizingly little compass error in the old whirligig—till that third passage up.

The discovery was made one night by accident. We were about ten miles off the Zambales coast with a steady breeze on our starboard quarter. We were making a northerly course so as to get Point Bolinao abeam before we rounded in for Lingayen Gulf.

I was standing against the taffrail. A Filipino named Manuel had the wheel, and he was a good helmsman, too. I happened to be watching a star dead ahead, low on the horizon and snugged up against the foremast. I'm sure Manuel had been making a good course till he began to give the schooner a slow lee-wheel that hauled her in at least three points for the land. There was no moon and the coast was a black blur on our starboard beam.

I leaped forward and grabbed the spokes of the wheel, as Manuel began to mutter something. I looked at the compass—and instead of finding him off his course, the lubber line was at North! And now the loom of the land was dead ahead.

But I swung the schooner's head to sea, and got the same star I had been watching before so that it crowded the foremast. I kept my eye on the compass, and to my amazement it swung westerly three points after a few minutes and was again at North. Well, if the sky had been overcast and the and not visible, steering by compass we would have piled up on the coast of Luzon.

Manuel was still spluttering something about how the compass had fooled him, and I told him not to mind, and he took the wheel again.

Captain Gibbins, in pajamas, stuck his head up through the companion and asked what was wrong.

"The compass fell off three points, sir—easterly—and then swung back again. In no time we'd be climbing the land, with that sort of a how-de-do."

He came up and watched the compass a few minutes, but I felt that he was neither impressed by what I had told him, nor worried. But he kept rubbing his head. I suspected that he had seen we were off course by the telltale compass in his cabin.

"Have you been asleep?" I asked.

"No—can't sleep," he said, and sighed deeply, as if he were in pain.

"That's too bad, sir."

He stooped and started down the companion.

"Come below a minute," he said, and I followed him into the cuddy. He went into his cabin and came out with a pad and pencil, gave me one of his queer looks and turned up the swinging lamp over the cuddy table. He sat down, made a motion with his hand to me to take the chair across from him, and I dropped into it, wondering what he was up to. He seemed to be half asleep yet his eyes were bright—too bright, perhaps—and had the look of fever in them. He glanced about the cuddy into the moving shadows as if he expected to see something which he knew was not there.

Presently he picked up the pencil and held it on the pad. He looked at the bulkhead behind me, as if he were thinking out what he was going to write.

"Are you sure you want me, sir?" I asked, feeling a bit creepy about his looks and that peculiar set stare of his right over my shoulder.

"Sit still," he said, in a droning kind of a way, without shifting his eyes from the bulkhead. "There's nothing to be scared about. I never let the others see this—and when I told 'em, they didn't like it. You know all about it, I guess. I'm going to draw a picture—anyhow, I feel like I always do when it comes—there—watch!"

His hand began to move slowly across the paper, and the pencil made faint lines on it. Gibbins's eyes were on the pencil now, and he watched its progress with unwinking stare. His hand moved with a circular motion, but not always did the pencil touch the paper—it seemed to lift at times.

Slowly his hand moved round and round, drawing what looked to me from across the table meaningless lines and curves. After a few minutes the pencil stopped.

"There it is!" said Gibbins, and handed the paper over to me. "Ever seen that place?"

I TURNED my head so as to get the swaying lamp above at the right angle. Still, I could make nothing of the faint lines on the paper. I stood up and held it close to the lamp. Then I saw that the lines and curves made a picture. There was a line which marked a beach, a big rock beyond with its top split open, and nearby a cluster of palm trees. Three of the trees were plain enough—and one of them crossed two, in such way that the group made a crude N, or perhaps nearer an H, for the crossing tree was bent over so as to be almost horizontal.

"I can't say I've seen the place, no," I said. "Why do you draw it?"

"Can't help it," he said weakly. "Maybe I'm out of my head, but I draw that picture—or the pencil does—every time I come up this coast in the night. I guess you've heard about the *Creole Queen*—and the girl I was going to marry. There's talk enough about it—and me—and this—in Manila."

I admitted I'd heard.

"When did this begin?" I asked.

"Months ago," he said wearily, passing his hand in front of his brow. "I couldn't sleep. I was off the land about in the same place we are to-night, and couldn't sleep. I'd not been able to get the sun the day before and it was a black night. I figured over my dead reckoning, and was on the same course we're on tonight. My pencil began to quiver, and it drew over my figures this picture I didn't know what to make of it—but we nearly went ashore, because when I got on deck, the land was dead ahead and breakers under our bows. We hauled out just in time."

"It's that rotten compass of yours!" I said.

"The compass is all right—and the compass doesn't make these pictures," he answered.

"You ought to get off this coast, sir."

"I make it my business to stay on this coast. That's why I ferry hay up here for the government. I'm going to stay with this thing and see if I can't make it out. Wait! I want to show you something—you're not like the others. They all got scared stiff. You're the first I ever let see the drawing done, but the others got wind of it.

"Sollars stole the one I made the last trip he had with me, and that was it he left in the Shipmasters Club. I heard you'd been talking about it to Fearoyd, so I knew you wouldn't mind to see it done. But I want to show you the others."

He stood up and stepped to his cabin. He was back in a minute with some twenty-odd sheets of paper, and on all of them drawn in the same faint lines, the picture of the shore line, the big rock with the blasted top, and the three palm trees with one of them crossed on the others.

"That's the lot—except for one or two that I threw away, and the one Sollars took," said Gibbins.

I didn't know what to say, but I had to calm him with something, so I remarked that it was all something that he'd got fixed in his mind, and drew the picture by habit. I told him about the master that got so wound up with calculations about the star Arcturus which is twenty-five hundred billions of miles away, that he came within an ace of piling his ship up on a reef that was under his nose. But when I got done Gibbins shook his head, and sighed.

"I can sleep now, Mr. Wilks," he said, turning to his cabin. "That's all—don't let this thing worry you. If it wasn't that I think you've got more sense than the others, I'd not have shown you this."

So I went back on deck. The next day Gibbins was no different than usual, though he looked more puzzled, perhaps, than was common with him. He went about his work without a word of what had come up in the night. I saw that he wanted to keep off the subject so I kept still.

On the passage back to Manila he spent the whole of every day on deck with an old-fashioned telescope, studying the shore line of the Zambales coast. And we held in close to the land—closer than I thought safe with the set of the currents and the periods of calm we encountered. Several times we were drifting to landward without breeze enough to give us steerage way.

In Manila I had a compass adjuster tinker up the mess of junk we called a compass. When I told him the trick it had played on me, he grinned and went on whistling softly, as if he felt that there was a lot I didn't know about compasses. But I'll wager I knew as much as he did, for all his know-it-all way.

THERE'S a lot to be learned about compass variation, I'll admit. It's a puzzle to science, in spite of the theories about polar currents of magnetic fields and all that. On a chart of the North Pacific, for instance, you will find a black curve that sweeps from Kamchatka and out to seaward far below Japan, where it cuts across the northern coast of Luzon and swings in toward China, going ashore in the vicinity of Canton. On that line there is no variation of the compass.

But to the east and west of this no-variation line, you will find faint lines drawn all over the Pacific which reveal zones of variation, increasing at irregular distances from the no-variation line. When you get into mid-Pacific you find that these lines are erratic—instead of curving to the west, they turn sharply and curve to the east.

Then you will find a line which begins in Behring Strait and swoops southward to well north of the Hawaiian Islands, where it loops off to the east and hits the California coast a little to the north of San Diego. That line shows where the compass is fifteen degrees easterly off the true direction. In steering a ship, that fifteen degrees have to be allowed for, when the course is set by the navigator.

Now we don't know the cause of variation. It changes at irregular intervals and in some parts of the world it changes faster than in others. We can chart variation—but we can't explain it. That cocky compass adjuster in Manila had to admit that he didn't know the cause for variation, but he excused his ignorance on the grounds that nobody else did, which wasn't any excuse at all so far as I was concerned. He had no business putting on airs with me about his knowledge of compasses.

Gibbins and I made a couple of trips to Lingayen after that without incident. At least, nothing happened that he told me about. We were into September by this time, and on the next passage up we were barely clear of Corregidor before we began to get the weather that goes with typhoons—variable breezes and a disturbance of the barometer's diurnal range.

The next day we had a steady breeze from the west that drove us well north toward a sky streaked with feathery clouds. The night came on nasty, with a heavy sea and successive squalls that dumped water on us out of the sky by the ton. Toward midnight the wind began shifting steadily and we knew we were in for it—September being the pet month for typhoons.

We were about ten miles off the Zambales coast, and the barometer reading was 28.90. Conditions showed us that we were in the right semi-circle of a typhoon that was moving north-northeast, with the wind blowing great guns from the east-southeast. We hove to on the starboard tack so as to meet the storm in the proper way.

At two bells—an hour after midnight—we had a barometer of 29.70, which proved us we were well in the track of a curving twister. The *Bangor Maid* began laboring and straining, for huge seas were driving at us now from all directions and it began to look as if we would broach to. Our storm canvas left us with a roar just as the lightning ripped the double bottoms out of ——, and in the flash I saw the land right under us to starboard where it shouldn't be at all. I was lashed to the wheel and I tried to throw off the lashings, but we were taking big rolling seas right over the stern and it was impossible for me to do anything.

When the lightning flashed again I saw Gibbins' face. He was staring ahead and had seen the great smother of water against the land—and the hills above. The Filipino cook was screaming prayers below in the cuddy. The crew were either in the forecastle—or gone overside. It made little difference where they were now, for we were all headed on the same road to destruction.

Once more the lightning split the heavens. I saw Captain Gibbins lift an arm to point. I threw my head down to him, for his mouth was open and he was yelling something I could not hear. He seemed to be smiling, but I could not hear what he was trying to say, for we drove into the breakers and struck with such force that I believe the schooner was shattered to the stepping of the main.

The masts snapped short off and all our top hamper dove ahead for the land with a great popping of stays and a rending of timbers. Our stern was lifted straight up and Gibbins and I were thrown against the cabin trunk.

The wind fell suddenly. We were in the eye of the storm. I saw a star overhead. But there was no chance for life in such a surf while lashed to the wheel. There was little chance in the water anyway, when it came to that, but with the stern swinging broadside to the beach we would soon be rolled over and over with it. Not to get clear was inviting death.

"Look!" I heard Gibbins yell in the next flash of lightning. He pointed, but the light was gone before I could follow the direction of his arm. But I cared little for what he said then. I was busy cutting myself out of my oilskins and getting free of the lashings between seas. I had nothing on my feet.

We were deluged successively for several minutes after that. The seas tore at us and smothered us. At times I never expected to have any air in my lungs again. Then the typhoon renewed itself from the opposite direction and with a fresh fury. The eye of the storm had passed over us with its temporary lull, and we were in the tail of it. The lightning played with new force, revealing the murk of the dense cloud canopy overhead.

Gibbins threw his face down upon my head and I heard him screaming—

"There it is—look!"

THE stern was hove up and turned turtle. I found myself clear of it and being rocked in the wild cradle of seething waters—up-up-up, then down-down-down, till there was no more up nor down for me but just smothering helplessness and a roaring cataract. I lost consciousness.

It was well after daylight when I found myself lying face down on a sandy bit of beach that had been swept by the brooms of a million devils. My legs were being pounded in the combers amid a tangle of the schooner's rigging. But for that I should have been combed off the beach long before and sucked out to sea by the undertow, for the breakers were still vicious, though the wind had lost its hurricane force.

I was naked except for the remnants of a cotton singlet, and my body was torn and bleeding from head to foot. I had barely enough strength left to pull myself inch by inch up the hard wet sand of the shingle. And I lay still for more than an hour. The heat of the sun gave me new life. My lower lip was swollen and cut, for I had probably sunk my teeth into it while trying to keep my mouth closed with lungs bursting for air under water.

Though I was burning with fever and my tongue and throat swelling for the want of a drink, I let the sun beat upon me without making any attempt to get up or to shake the sand out of my ears and hair.

When I could endure the heat no longer I began to drag myself along the beach, well out of reach of the combers, through the litter of wreckage and burst bales of hay like heaps of kelp which ruffled the sand-spit. I found two of the Filipinos dead, and later came upon the bows of our long-boat —with a breaker of water lashed to them. I drank heavily and was well revived.

I sat up and took a look round now, to see if I could recognize anything. I saw that we had come aground in a narrow inlet that was masked from the open sea by a low point of land. And in the jaw of the inlet was a great rock, its top whitened by bird-droppings. By it was a cluster of palm-trees. I knew there should be something familiar about the spot, but for a time I could not remember I had ever seen the inlet before.

Then I saw that the top of the rock was split, and that three of the palm-trees—made a letter N! One of them was behind the other two, but bent over almost horizontally—this was the spot which Captain Gibbins had been drawing but which he had never seen. But now I knew he had glimpsed it in the lightning flashes before we struck. That was what he had been yelling about and pointing out to me.

It was plain now why we had never been able to find this place coasting down Luzon. Gibbins had looked for it, but it was only from inside the inlet that the rock and the trees could be seen, for the shoulder of the point hid them to anybody looking from seaward.

But I was in no condition to think of such things then, nor little inclination. My head was reeling and I knew I must do two things—get out of the sun, and on the point where I would have a chance to attract the attention of some vessel which might be passing. The chance was slim enough. I dragged myself round the jaw of the inlet and went out on the point as far as I dared. My feet were sore and swollen and the rough rocks cut them, but I kept on till I got to the shade of some bushes on the seaward side. There I tied what was left of my shirt to a limb, and fainted as I lay looking up at it whipping in the wind.

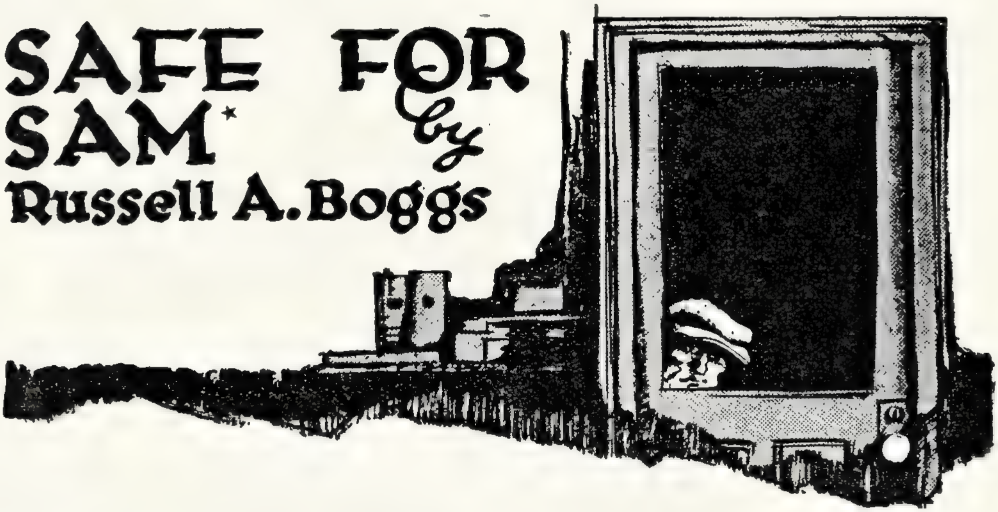
Late that afternoon the coastguard cutter *Negros* took me off the point. I was in good shape in a short time, and went back ashore to the scene of the wreck with the second officer in a boat. We wanted to look round, bury the dead, and get away.

The inlet was quiet now, no more than the usual ground swell snoring on the beach where the *Bangor Maid* had struck. There was a clean sandy bottom and some patches of coral. We found no other bodies than the two I had come across.

But just inside the point we found an old spar driven deep into the sand. And then, in the water, the flattened skeleton of a big ship lying on the bottom in about five fathoms. The water was clear, the sand white, and the sun striking aslant, we could see her ribs plainly enough. We went over the wreck, and about amidships of her, could see a green bulb—the rusted ship's bell. We sent down one of the boat's crew—a Filipino who had been a pearl-diver—and he made a heaving line fast to the bell. After several attempts he pried the bell loose and brought it up. We could make out the letters C, U and N. It was the bell of the *Coral Queen*. Captain Gibbins, it appeared, had found Allie Nessler at last.

SAFE FOR SAM*

by Russell A. Boggs



Author of "Old Fellows," "The San Marcos Affair," etc.

WHEN Lee Wheeler, N. & P., first trick operator at Willowburn—"WN"—tower, came on duty at seven o'clock Monday morning he found Sam Loomis, the elderly third trick man, talking to himself. Sam's nervousness and eccentricity were common gossip from end to end of the division, and to Wheeler especially were no secret traits. Hence the first trick operator for a few moments paid slight attention to Loomis' mutterings, despite his genuine regard for the older man, now well over fifty.

"Blamed funny going's-on 'round here!" grumbled Sam as he pulled on his coat. And then, as Lee seemingly gave no heed, he repeated—"Blamed funny going's-on 'round here!"

"Yes," agreed Lee amiably but absently.

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Sam. He abruptly tilted a chair against the side wall and sat down on it. "Right here I was sittin', and when I happened to look up there was a big fellow peepin' in through the door glass at me! Right at me, he was lookin'!"

"How's that?" said Wheeler, now displaying some interest. "A big fellow peeping in at you?"

"Yes, sir!" proclaimed Sam. "A big fellow with a big face, and bad eyes! But he ducked, quick, when I looked up!"

"Oh, piffle, Sam!" said Lee. "You were sleeping. You only thought you saw him; it was a dream."

"Sleeping!" ejaculated Loomis. "Not me! I was just tilted back there against the wall takin' it easy, because there was nothing doin'. Had my eyes shut, maybe; but I wasn't sleeping—no, sir! Right close-up against the glass he had his face. And after he ducked I heard him sneakin' down the steps, careful like!"

"Why didn't you open the door and ask him what he wanted?"

Sam bounced to his feet and drew himself clear erect.

"Who, me?" he grumbled. "I'm five feet four, and I bet that guy was all of six feet! No, sir! Ask him nothing! I was mighty glad to see him going; I didn't want to see him stop!"

Lee laughed.

"Guess you were wise, all right. Better get yourself a gun."

"Little good a gun'd do me," grunted Loomis. He shuffled toward the door. "I couldn't hit a barn; be more liable to shoot myself." He jerked the door open. "I'm going somewheres where I can get me a job daytimes. I've had enough of this night stuff!"

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"Fiddlesticks, Sam!" said Lee. "Don't let some wandering hobo get on your nerves like that!"

"You'll see!" insisted Sam. He jerked the door shut and, still muttering, went down the outside stairway which connected the tower office with the ground.

From a tower window Lee watched Loomis trudge up the track westward, toward Willowburn town proper, something like half a mile distant.

"You're a good old bird, Sam," mused Wheeler, a little grin on his clean, lean young face. "If you take the notion, you will quit, too." Then the grin abruptly faded. "But you're getting old, Sam; too old to be knocking about hunting a job." He picked up his pen as the next block office to the east started an OS. "Hmmh! Wonder if he really did see anybody last night?"

However that might have been, when Wheeler came to work the following morning, Tuesday, he found Sam Loomis had not taken his departure. But Sam plainly was in a state of nerves.

"Well, Sammy, still on the job, I see!" greeted Lee merrily.

"Yes, yes," returned Loomis quickly. He paced the office with visible agitation. "But I'm all jumpy, Wheeler! The whole blessed night I kept looking over at that door, expecting every time to see that big face lookin' in at me!"

"Didn't see anything, did you?"

"N-no," admitted Sam. "I didn't see anything; but I'm pretty sure I heard something."

"What?"

"A noise like somebody was banging something against the bottom of the tower. A couple times, I heard it. Like somebody hammering on the side with a big chunk of wood."

"I'd forget it," counseled Lee. "Your imagination is working. What would anybody want around here? They'd know there was nothing in the tower worth taking—and that an operator never has any money!"

"I know that," said Sam. "But it's got me fanning; I'll go all to pieces."

"Take a long walk," advised Wheeler. "Get out in the air. That'll help soothe your nervous system."

"It's this night stuff," persisted Sam, preparing to leave. "I got to get me a day job."

He went out, leaving Lee puzzled and speculating.

"Do you suppose," said Wheeler to himself, "that somebody is trying to scare Sam for just that purpose—to get him off his job? A man might think that. But just what would be the object?"

SHORTLY after noon Lee had a visitor—Mr. Brayle, who was assistant to Division Operator Powell, with headquarters in Gray Junction, something like an hour's ride to the east. Brayle dropped off a west-bound light engine; a cold-faced, nosey individual who was by no means widely popular. He was in reality a sort of chief clerk, having no official title; but it was quite generally and freely said that he would have liked one.

As far as Lee Wheeler was concerned, it invariably pleased the first trick man to be facetious when the assistant was around, this being due to a certain quaint delight in watching Brayle squirm in his efforts to maintain an official poise.

"Come in, Mr. Powell," invited Lee, as Brayle appeared in the doorway.

The division operator's man stepped inside. Try as he might, he never seemed able to wear successfully that polished air of ease and authority when with Wheeler that he attempted to assume when in the proximity of other employees whom he considered his inferiors.

"How are you, Wheeler?" he said, moving toward the front of the office.

Lee now appeared to discover his mistake for the first time.

"Oh," he said, "it isn't Mr. Powell; it's only Mr. Brayle. I'm well. How are you? If it's an inspection trip you'll likely find a little dust back under that stationery case. If you get down on your hands and knees and rub your nose on the floor you can see it. Been there several months and will be several more. Put it down in your little book; it'll make interesting reading for the big boys when you turn it in. Outside of that I don't know what you can find. Sorry to disappoint you, but things are in pretty good shape, taking them by and large."

"Now, Wheeler," protested Brayle, a little uncertainly, "nothing like that. I'm just dropping in all along the line to say hello. Little friendly calls, you know. Glad everything is going good for you. How's Loomis?"

Lee did not know why, but Brayle's last words were to him like an electric spark. A warning shot into his head to be careful, to use his wits. Deliberately he squared his train sheet on the table before him before answering.

"Loomis?" he said. Then casually—"Oh, I guess Sam is so-so."

"He's such an excitable fellow," explained Brayle. "Somebody was telling me he claimed a man had been peeping in at him."

"Who was telling you?" questioned Lee. His eyes rested easily on Brayle's face.

The latter was a little confused.

"Why, er—one of the boys," he replied.

"Benton, maybe?"

"N-no, not Benton. Let's see. I seem to have forgotten."

"Garwin?"

"No." Brayle displayed a hint of irritation. "I don't remember."

"Isn't that odd," said Lee amiably. "It wouldn't be Fuller?"

"No," said Brayle shortly. "What does it matter?"

"I'm not saying it does; I'm merely asking." Wheeler regarded Brayle evenly. "Since you mention it, I believe Loomis did say somebody had been bothering around. Why do you suppose anybody would want to scare Sam away from his trick?"

The division operator's assistant apparently was momentarily disconcerted by the abrupt question.

"How's that? Scare Loomis away?" he jerked out. "What makes you say that?"

"Different things," replied Lee unhurriedly. "But you haven't answered my question."

"Bosh!" said Brayle. "No one's trying to frighten him!"

"You're dead sure?"

"Of course! You know Loomis." Brayle made a gesture of absolute assurance.

"Y-yes," said Lee slowly, "in a way. But I wasn't so certain. It's such a relief to be advised by an authority that Sam's troubles are mere hallucinations." He heaved a long sigh to show how relieved he truly was. "Sam did seem real worried. Talked some of leaving."

"He did?" The quick interest in the other's tone did not escape Lee.

"Yes, a little. But I've been telling him to buck up." Wheeler's words dwindled into indifference, as if the matter no longer greatly interested him. He began to hum a little song:

Number Nine whistlin 'round the bend—
Good-by, my honey, good-by!
Haven't got no money to spend—
Good-by, my honey, good-by!

As he ceased he observed that Brayle was moving toward the door.

"You're not leaving?" said the first trick man. "You are! Well, come in again some day. Always glad to welcome visitors and show 'em how the wheels go 'round."

"Good-by," said Brayle.

* * *

WHEELER contemplated the division operator's man as Brayle moved along the track in the direction of Willowburn depot.

"Now here's a pretty howdy-do," he remarked aloud. "You funny piece of spoiled cheese! You're about as complicated as a straight line between two simple points. But that reminds me."

He opened his block wire and called "SD," the next block office to the east.

"Has Brayle been in there to-day?" he asked, when "SD" acknowledged the call.

"No," said "SD."

"O K," said Lee. "Thanks."

He then called "MD," the block office beyond "SD" and asked the same question. And "MD'S" answer likewise was in the negative.

"I'm not surprized," said Lee to himself, closing the key. "Of course he lied. And he lied about Loomis; I knew it. It was none of our boys told him about Sam's scare. But who did? Some outsider. What outsider? I don't know; maybe the guy himself—the one Sam saw. Huh! Wouldn't that be queer!"

He walked to the rear of the office, then returned to the telegraph table in front, thinking hard, a little frown on his face.

"Sam, you're right; there's something wrong here. Somebody wants to get you away. Who? Brayle was awful interested. He wouldn't have made this special trip out to see how you were taking it if he wasn't. He couldn't seem to fool me much. Funny, too." He stopped suddenly, cracking his palms together.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Believe I see something! It's not Sam they're after especially; it's his job they want! See where that lets Brayle in? Why, dang it all, yes! Brayle will be watching, and soon as Sam throws it up he'll place the man he's picked on third! He could work that, the son-of-a-gun!

"Next thing is, what's the big idea behind it? Hardly think Brayle would go to all that trouble merely to place a friend. Must be something bigger. I must think that over. Brayle will gather from what I told him that Sam needs a little more before he'll call it a day. There'll more'n likely be another demonstration some time to-night."

THERE were four men in the little upstairs room of Gray Junction's most unassuming hotel. The first was a tall, red-faced, burly man with a deep voice. The second was of medium height, quick and wiry. The third was a fashion-plate from cravat to spats, a sophisticated person of near thirty, his eyes round and blue and strangely hard. The fourth man was Brayle, just arrived.

"Well?" said the second man. He looked at Brayle. "What is the dope? Can we make it tomorrow?"

"Things are coming along, Dusty," answered Brayle, looking a little worried, "pretty well."

"What do you mean, pretty well?" demanded the other. "Spill it! What'd you find out today?"

"We've got Loomis going, no doubt of that," returned the N. & P. man. "He's talking about quitting. About one more jolt, I figure, will fix him."

"I call that —— good," asserted Dusty. "Shark, here, can hand him that tonight. Eh, Shark?"

"You know it!" The first man grinned.

"That's all right enough," agreed Brayle. "But we've got to be more careful."

"How comes?"

"Wheeler, that blasted first trick operator at "WN," has something on his mind. He asked me today why any one would want to scare Loomis away. Do you see? He was flip as the devil all the time I was there."

"Oh, the —— with him!" Big Shark sniffed his disdain. "One of these clever boys! If he gets in the road I'll hand him one that'll put him where he belongs."

But Brayle seemed not greatly impressed.

"I'm not strong for Wheeler, myself," he stated. "But I'd be worse than a fool if I'd let that keep me from saying he's nobody's jackass. I tell you, I'm worried. If he takes a notion there's something up and goes into it, there's no person going to stop him; not one, or all, of us. He's that kind."

He turned to the flashy-looking third man, who so far had done nothing but listen.

"I want to warn you, Seeley. When you go to work there you be almighty careful. Don't let him get hold of anything that'll make him suspicious of you. This is not for your sake only; it's for ours as well. I've gone into this thing too far now to feel any too comfortable."

Seeley with a somewhat bored air lit a cigaret.

"Don't get fussed, old top. I fancy we can handle him."

"I hope so. Anyway, you stick close to your room tomorrow. If Shark works right tonight I judge Loomis will be ready to throw up the sponge by tomorrow morning. I wouldn't be surprized if he came in to see the old man. Just as soon as I know, or see him, I'll tip you off over the 'phone. Then you beat it up to the office, quick."

Seeley waved his cigaret.

"I'll be ready," he said.

Brayle faced the two others.

"Dusty," he said, "you better take Shark out in the truck tonight. You can make it easy by midnight. Find some good place near Willowburn where you can keep the truck under cover tomorrow. If we can get Loomis loose and put Seeley down there tomorrow we'll make a try for that first big shipment which Gip advises will come through on Ninety-Two tomorrow night. I'll get word to Gip. If we can't work it in time we'll just have to wait a few days till the next one comes through."

Dusty pulled his greasy cap tighter on his head.

"That's the talk, bo'!" he said. "That's what we want to hear! Come on, Shark; we'll go down and tune the old boat up a bit. Looks like she'll have work to do 'fore long!"

But Brayle held up his hand. "I want to go first. Wait ten minutes before you leave. We can't be too careful."

He moved toward the door.

"You're all on?" he said questioningly, looking back. "There must be no slips."

All three nodded. He went out.

ABOUT ten o'clock Tuesday night the door-bell of Division Operator Powell's house in Gray Junction rang vigorously. The division operator was just about to sit down for a quiet half-hour with his evening paper, the other members of his family having retired. He answered the summons himself.

"Good evening, Mr. Powell," said the man who had rung. "Could I speak to you for a few minutes?"

The division operator thrust his gray-streaked head forward in his endeavor to perceive the identity of the caller standing in the gloom of the vestibule.

"Good evening!" he said. "Why, yes; come in."

The caller stepped into the light of the hall.

"Why, Wheeler! I didn't recognize you," exclaimed Powell. "Come right in!"

He led the way into a large living room and motioned toward a big chair.

"Sit down!"

"I'll only keep you a short time," said Wheeler as he seated himself. "I know you're wondering what brings me," he went on quickly. "I came in from Willowburn on an extra this evening and got in way too late to find you in your office. I considered it important that I see you. That's why I've come to your home."

"Quite right," stated Powell. "Glad you did. And what's the trouble?"

"Mr. Powell," said Lee without preliminary, "I think that about tomorrow Loomis will be quitting the third trick at 'WN.' Very likely he'll come into your office about it. It's in connection with his leaving that I've come."

"Loomis quitting?" exclaimed the division operator. "Why?"

"Haven't you heard?" said Lee. "Brayle was out today and he seemed to know about it. Some one's been frightening Loomis at night; looking through the glass and making noises around. You know how nervous he is anyway. He told me today he couldn't stand it."

"You don't mean it!" ejaculated Powell. "Why, no; I haven't heard a thing! You say Brayle knows? That's odd! Who would be doing it?"

"I'm not just sure," returned Wheeler. "But I'll admit I've been doing some figuring. I think they'll be around the tower again tonight; that's what makes me believe Loomis will give it up tomorrow."

"But we can fix that!" declared Powell. "I'll have a couple of our police officers sent out there and break it up."

Wheeler, however, shook his head.

"I was thinking of that, too," he said. "But I'm afraid it's not so simple as it may look. I've made a few deductions and formed a sort of plan. I'd like to go over it with you."

"Well," said Powell, "of course. Go ahead."

"All right," responded Lee. "First: When Loomis comes in he'll probably ask you for a day job. I wonder if you've one you could place him on?"

The division operator wrinkled his brow. "I'm afraid not," he said slowly. "N-no; I can't think of a place. We're pretty well filled up."

"I was afraid there might be none. The thing is, that if he doesn't get a day trick he is liable to quit; in fact, I feel positive he will. And Loomis is getting along to the age where it's not so easy to pick up a job; if he leaves he may find himself up against it. That's one of the chief reasons why I'm concerning myself about this. I hate like thunder to see him bluffed out!"

"You're right," agreed Powell. "Loomis is not a young man any more."

"My idea, then," resumed Lee, "is to work it like this: Bright and early tomorrow morning you send me a message reading, 'Why did you allow Extra So-and-so to cross over at "WN" yesterday without obtaining permission from the dispatcher'?"

The division operator looked perplexed.

"But you didn't!"

"Wait," said Lee. "This is part of the game. I'll reply, 'Permitted Extra So-and-so to cross over because no other trains close in either direction.'

"Then you will wire me, 'Your explanation unsatisfactory. Instructions clearly state trains must not be allowed to cross over without first getting dispatcher's OK. You will be relieved of your duties at "WN" for fifteen days, effective tomorrow.' " Wheeler smiled at the division operator. "Do you begin to get what I am after?"

"I believe I do, partly," returned Powell, still a trifle puzzled. "You want a fifteen days' suspension; I see that. And then what? Am I to put Loomis on your trick?"

"Exactly," confirmed Lee. "Sam wouldn't take it if he thought I laid off just to keep him on; but this way he'll not object."

"But if that's all you're after, why don't you and Sam just trade tricks?"

"I'd do that," said Lee, "only it would spoil all the rest. The people who are working so hard to get Sam off have a man already picked for the third trick. I'm pretty confident I'm not wrong there. If I took third it would gum up the machinery; the thing wouldn't develop. And that's another reason why I want some time off. Now that it's gone this far I want to see the thing develop; and I want to be free to watch it."

"What do you think it will be?" said Powell.

"I don't know yet," returned Lee. "But it'll be something. I'd gamble on that."

THE division operator thoughtfully stroked his chin while he regarded Wheeler with a half-humorous, half-serious expression.

"You're a case, Wheeler," he said then. "I gather that you consider this matter too deep for our police, so you'd better lay off work and look after it yourself. Isn't that right?"

Lee grinned a trifle.

"Well," he conceded, "I suppose it does appear something like that; and for want of a better description I'm willing to let it stand that way. Only please don't forget I'm in dead earnest. I'm bound I'm going to make third trick safe for Sam Loomis!"

"You make me curious," said Powell. "All right; I'll take a chance. After we fix Loomis on first, what comes?"

"As I said, I've figured there'll be an applicant for third at "WN" right off. I'd like to have you let him take Loomis' old job. Probably he'll be recommended by some one in your office."

"Brayle?" said Powell. His questioning eyes were grave.

Lee hesitated an instant.

"I think so," he admitted.

"You believe he's mixed up in this?" pressed the official.

"Mr. Powell," said Lee, "I don't like to say. The thing will work itself out. I hate to cast reflections without actual proof, however positive I may feel myself."

"I see," agreed Powell. "Very well; we'll let it go at that." He paused. "But suppose nothing comes of it within your fifteen days?"

"I imagine something will," replied Lee. "But if nothing does we'll have to wait. I expect to lay low, to let it be understood that I've left Willowburn. That will please the plotters; and of course if I'm not around Loomis can keep on working first."

"You'll not want me to mention anything of this to Brayle?"

"Oh, no; not a word. Don't let him think you've any inkling that something may be wrong. You might let him happen to see the messages about my suspension."

"I understand," said Powell. "I'll do as you suggest."

"Then I guess that will be all," said Lee. He arose and made a step backward. "Thanks, very much. I believe we'll find we've done the right thing."

"If it does turn out that way I'll see you lose no time over your lay-off," promised the division operator.

"That's not been worrying me a bit," replied Lee. He turned to the door. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Powell.

It was shortly past eleven at night, when Lee Wheeler entered the dispatchers' room in the Gray Junction depot building. The third trick dispatcher looked up from his desk.

"Hello, Wheeler," he said.

"Have you anything going west, Tom?" asked Lee. "I'd like to get back to Willowburn and all the fast cars that stop there have gone."

"There's a crew to be called for three-thirty," answered the dispatcher. "They'll take a light engine and caboose to the other end. Afraid that's the best in sight."

"Well, if that's the best it'll have to do," stated Lee. "Would you mind giving 'em a message to drop me off at Willowburn?"

"Sure," assented Tom. "And if you want to take a nap while you wait go into that next room. You'll find a bench there and some old cushions. I'll see you're called in time."

"That'll be fine," said Lee. "How's she going? Everything moving good?"

"Pretty fair," advised the dispatcher. "About all I've got to worry me now is to get Ninety-Two over the road. She's just left the west end. Not so bad now as she'll be tomorrow night."

"That so?"

"Yes," said the gossipy Tom. "Understand she's to haul some cars of silk. The big chiefs have promised to wring my neck if I don't bring 'er through on the dot then."

"Silk," said Lee. "Oh, yes." He tickled the top of his right ear. "I see. Well, believe I'll take that nap."

WHEN at the regular hour Wednesday morning Wheeler arrived at "WN" tower, he found that his surmises as to Loomis' condition were remarkably accurate. Sam was fairly prancing around the office.

"I'm done!" he cried as soon as Lee opened the door. "Done, I tell you! I'll not work here another night!"

"What now, Sam?" asked the younger man.

"What now!" exclaimed the third trick operator. "Why, here about midnight I had to go down to hand a message on to a west-bound extra, and just as I reached the ground I got a glimpse of a fellow sneaking in behind the coal shed! Yes, sir; a big fellow—just like the one that peeked in through the glass! And I hadn't any more'n got back in the office when something heavy hit near the top of the stairway and then went bumping and banging down the steps. It was a big lump of coal that devil had thrown at me; you can see pieces of it out there yet!"

Lee had noticed the black bits as he ascended the stairway. He walked to the desk and put down his lunch basket before replying.

"I saw that coal," he said then. "Does look funny, doesn't it?"

"Funny!" echoed Loomis. "It's too funny for me! I'm going!" He started to snatch up his few personal belongings which were scattered about the office—a "bug," raincoat, a worn pair of gloves.

"I'm going to catch Number Eighteen at Willowburn station and go in and see Powell," he declared. "I'll be talking to the 'Old Man' inside of two hours. If he can't give me a day job somewhere I'll tell him to give me my time. I'll not be back here to work tonight, count on that!"

Wheeler watched him in silence. If steps had not already been taken, if he had not been forehanded, he would have been considerably concerned. But under the circumstances he felt matters would be adjusted.

"Well, Sam, you know best," he said presently. "I wish you the best of luck." He couldn't say much, so he let it go at that.

And Sam departed a few minutes later with his small collection of possessions. As he had on Monday morning, from the window Lee regarded the little man trudging up toward Willowburn. The first trick man's expression was that of whole-hearted sympathy.

"By Judas, Sam!" he said earnestly. "It's a shame! Picking on a little fellow like you! I swear to Hannah, I'm going to see what's inside this thing, or bust!"

He heard Gray Junction office calling him on the wire and he turned to the key. A little smile came into his face.

"I expect that'll be Mr. Powell's 'why-did-you' message," he said.

IT WAS near a quarter to three that afternoon when Sam Loomis' successor arrived. He'd come from Gray Junction on a train arriving at Willowburn station at two-ten. He opened the tower office door and stepped inside.

"I'm Seeley," he said to the first trick man. "Come to take Loomis' place. Thought I'd drop in and look things over a bit so I'll know what's what when I come on tonight."

"Sure," said Lee. "Help yourself. My name's Wheeler."

He did not like Seeley; he knew that immediately, without hesitation or debate. Seeley was too smooth. So smooth, in fact, that he gave the impression of being something false, not human. Lee didn't like his clothes, his nose, his chin, his mouth, his eyes, his voice—nor anything about him. But, nevertheless, the first trick man carefully concealed any sign of antipathy.

"Understand Loomis got cold feet," rattled on Seeley. "So Powell sent me down."

"I suppose you'll not distress yourself about any ghosts at night?"

"Slush!" said Seeley. "Nothing'll bother me."

"That's good," said Lee. He rose from his chair and stretched lazily. "Ho-hum! Guess I'll be packing up, too. The old man's given me fifteen days."

"He did?" said Seeley quickly. "What's that for?"

"For letting a train cross over without the dispatcher's OK," answered Wheeler, his tone indicating that he considered himself somewhat ill-treated. "Red tape stuff, you know."

"Get out! And you say you're going to pack up?"

"Yes. I figure I'll fold and blow this evening. Catch me taking fifteen days on this joint. Too many other good places to go to."

"You're right, old man. Don't blame you a bit."

Seeley's inward satisfaction was not so well covered up, however, as to prevent Lee detecting a hint of it. He made no sign, but like Sam began to collect his things.

"I don't give a hoot," he affirmed. "Be kind of a relief to get loose."

ABOUT three hundred yards west of "WN" tower, or not quite half-way between the tower and the depot in Willowburn town, the N. & P. was intersected at right angles by a north-and-south highway. On the northern side of the tracks the surrounding land was clear of trees and underbrush, while on the southern side the road passed directly into a rather extensive stretch of second-growth timber and for a considerable distance ran through it. It was a highway not greatly traveled, being more of a byroad into the back country, and connecting on to the main highroad a little farther south

All things considered, it was a spot made to order for the affair which, Lee Wheeler felt, was to be pulled off this Wednesday night; a spot that doubtless had been a matter of careful selection by those involved. All parts of the affair were not clear to Wheeler. But as he mused and reflected in the midnight quiet near the road crossing, he believed that he was gradually aligning the segments into a semblance of order.

He had departed from the vicinity of Willowburn, as far as any person in or about the town knew. But he had not departed far, merely this quarter-mile east. With his suitcase in his hand, he had stepped on a local passenger train leaving Willowburn shortly after dark. But after the train had started he had promptly stepped off into the darkness on the other side, quite unseen.

A rumble in the north presently roused him. He faced that way, listening; and in a little time he beheld a single light bobbing this way and that as it moved down the roadway toward the tracks.

"A truck," muttered Lee. "Sort of thought there would be. We'll see."

The droning motor drew nearer. And in a few minutes, dimly vague in the starlit night, there passed across the tracks before his eyes a huge covered motor moving van, curtains flapping like quivering bat's wings. The truck cleared the rails, dipped into the shelter of the trees, which on the south side closely encroached on the N. & P. right-of-way, and stopped. The motor ceased its bumbling. By that time Wheeler had crept close.

"Switch off the lights," he heard a rather heavy voice say, guardedly. "This is the place."

"Right-o," said a second, milder voice. The single front lamp and the red tail lamp blinked out. "There." A short silence. "I s'pose a guy couldn't have a smoke?"

"Better not. Don't reckon there's any one around, though. Especially not since Seeley called the chief up this afternoon and told him that first-trick guy was leaving. He's the only one the chief was anyways bothered about. But we'll play safe; no smokes."

The words, carefully as they were spoken, reached Wheeler's ears where he lay, flat on the ground, not twenty feet from the speakers. He smiled in the darkness; he'd had Brayle worried, sure enough.

"Guess we just about made it on time." It was the second man. "He said to get here not more'n fifteen minutes before Ninety-Two was due. Must be about twelve-ten now."

"Just about. Don't s'pose there's any chance of Gip missing Ninety-Two."

"Naw! You know Gip'll not fall down on us; he never has yet. If that Seeley does his part and stops the high-ball freight you can count on Gip having the car open and about fifty thousand dollars worth of stuff out before you can bat your eye. All we'll have to do will be load up and beat it after Ninety-Two goes. That crew'll never know anything's happened when they leave here."

Wheeler, tense, ears straining, took in every word. This was something to hear! The links which had been missing in his chain were supplied. The plan lay before him, clear!

On the gentle breeze that came from the west drifted the far-distant, faint whistle of a train.

"There she is, Dusty!" exclaimed the first man's voice, rising a bit. "All out!"

Silently Wheeler backed away from the truck Dusty and his pal would not likely move far from their motor, he figured. They'd stick close until they'd see where Gip, the third man, was riding on Ninety-Two. Consequently when he had reached a point about fifty yards from the roadway, Lee increased his speed. With his plan of procedure well in mind, he made his way to the east; the tower was his objective.

"I'll look in on Seeley!" he said.

A few minutes later he noiselessly crept up the outside stairway. Peeping through the glass of the door at the top, he beheld Seeley seated at the telegraph table peering out the window to the west. The new operator was bending toward the window eagerly, his attitude that of a man nervous and anxious.

With the greatest caution Lee twisted the door knob. As he feared, he found Seeley had turned the lock. From his pocket Wheeler than drew something squat and hard. With this he tapped gently on the door, taking care to stoop down so that he was well in the shadow.

There were quick steps inside the office. Then Seeley's voice at the door.

"Who is it?"

"Dusty!"

LEE spoke in a husky voice, just loud enough, he judged, to penetrate to Seeley's ears.

"Quick, Seeley! Open up!"

Without hesitation the new operator turned the key. The door swung open. Lee swiftly stepped inside and thrust his pistol against Seeley's ribs.

"You'll do as I say, Seeley!" he said in his natural voice. "Raise your hands!"

As Loomis' successor heard the voice and as the light in the office fell on Wheeler's countenance, he was the picture of incredulity.

"Wheeler!" he exclaimed—but didn't forget to put up his hands.

"Right, first guess." Lee stepped close and ran his hand over the night man's garments. "No gun, eh? All right; you can put 'em down. Move up to the block levers and follow exactly the directions I give you. I'll stay back here, away from the windows. Hand me your train sheet."

Without a word the third trick operator lifted the sheet from the desk and passed it to Lee. With quick, experienced eyes the latter glanced over it, then handed it back.

"The block ahead for Ninety-Two is clear, I see," he said. "That's very good. She's getting close."

He moved back a step, keeping his gun on Seeley all the while.

"Now just what is your little scheme for Ninety-Two?" he asked then. "Were you intending to hold her up for a fake order, or message, while your buddies raided the silk car?"

The conjecture was a good one. By the swift expression of amazement on the other's face Wheeler knew that he had scored well.

"You ——!" said Seeley. "How—how——"

"How?" said Lee. "Well, from different things."

His words were cut short by the long, roaring whistle of the fast freight, calling for the block.

"Ninety-Two!" said Wheeler sharply. "Now, then, Seeley! Grab that eastbound lever and pull 'er clear!"

The night's man face was desperate. Like some animal at bay he glanced hungrily from left to right. But there was no getting away from the composed man who faced him.

"Quick, Seeley!" Wheeler's voice was no louder, but it had become cold, deadly. The pistol moved never so slightly in his hand. "Pull that signal clear!"

With something like a snarl Seeley, perceiving his position hopeless, grasped the lever and swung it far back. Number Ninety-Two's whistle rose twice, sharply, in acknowledgment. Then at a forty-mile clip the engine swept by the office, the vibration causing the whole tower to tremble.

One by one the cars of the fast freight zipped past. Then the caboose. Seeley let the block fall back. His lips were twisted; drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"You fool!" he cried at Lee. "You've done it now!"

"No; you have," returned Lee evenly. "Think of poor Gip—all alone on Ninety-Two, wondering why she didn't stop!"

The wrath in Seeley's eyes grew deeper.

"You think you've played ——!" he cried. "Well, you're not wrong! You'll never get away from here alive! Dusty and Shark will see to that!"

"I expect that pair's beating it away in their little old truck," returned Lee. "Asking each other what happened, and figuring on where they'd better get off."

"Not them!" proclaimed the night man. "You'll see!"

His guess was well founded. He had no more than ceased speaking when a voice came from out the darkness at the foot of the tower.

"Seeley!"

The single word floated in through the open door. A triumphant glare shone in the eyes of the man called. But the words that came to his lips were frozen by the activity of the other man in the tower.

"Not a word, not a move, but what I order!" commanded Lee in a low but decisive tone. "Here; step over toward the door!"

The third trick man did as directed and Wheeler retreated toward the rear of the office. The voice from below called again.

"Seeley!"

"Tell them to come up!" dictated Wheeler.

Seeley moistened his lips, then raised his voice.

"Come up!" he called.

Feet pounded on the steps, hurrying. Then through the doorway burst Dusty and Shark.

"What happened?" bellowed Shark's deep voice. "What're you trying to pull off here? Trying to double-cross us?"

The angry pair had never glanced toward the rear. But it was from there the next words came.

"Not him; me!" said Wheeler inelegantly. "Hands up, all 'round!"

The latest comers whirled about in the direction Seeley was already looking. The sight of the man there with the pistol, coming on top of his recent savage disappointment, seemed to drive Shark to abandoned recklessness, to extreme folly. With a scorching oath his hand swept back of him and a gun gleamed forth.

"Drop it!" shouted Wheeler. His pistol flamed, the shot crashing in the office with startling abruptness. Shark spun around, then keeled over, his own pistol exploding harmlessly at the ceiling.

"Are there any more?" Wheeler's voice was grim. "I hate to do it. But if necessary I'll blow all three of you down!"

There seemed to be no more. Dusty's arms—and Seeley's as well—were raised high. Lee stepped forward and took a pistol from the former's hip. He picked up the fallen man's gun, dropping both in his pocket.

"Now, then," he said, "you two look after the big fellow. I suppose he's the man that's been troubling Loomis. But no matter. I think you'll find I only creased him. A little water from that bucket'll bring him 'round."

The pair busied themselves as directed while Lee moved to the telegraph table. Standing sidewise, his weapon ready, he opned the train wire key.

"TOM," he said to the dispatcher, "this is Wheeler at 'WN.' Send a light engine with some police boys out here just as fast as the wheels will turn."

The sounder sputtered incoherently a few times; then: "What you talking about?" said the astonished dispatcher. "What's up?"

"I've got three candidates for the pen here and I want to get them off my hands," stated Wheeler. "They wanted to stop Ninety-Two and spoil one of those silk cars; but they didn't. She's by and gone OK. You hurry up, now. I'll have to sit and watch 'em till you get the officers here."

"For the love of Henry!" said the dispatcher. But he was trained to grasp things quickly. "All right, boy! I'll get 'em there in about an hour. OK!"

As Lee closed the key he heard Shark groan. The big man blinked, stirred, and sat up, assisted by his fellows; he looked around stupidly. But after they had given him a drink of water he appeared to gather his faculties together better.

"Get a clean hand towel out of that cupboard drawer and bind his head," said Lee. "Not bad, is it? I thought so. Yes, wind it around. Pretty good, eh? Want to sit on a chair? All right. Dusty, kick some of those chairs in a row over there and all of you be seated."

A few minutes later the three prisoners sat side by side facing Wheeler, the latter sitting with his back to the telegraph table, several paces distant from them. Shark sat in the middle of the three, apparently little the worse for wear, although decidedly morose.

"Well, boys," said Lee cheerfully, his gun resting easily on his knee, "we've got a social hour or so to pass away before help comes. Let's be agreeable and knock off the minutes pleasantly. Who's got a tale to tell? Seems to me some of you fellows ought to have. For instance, how did all this come about?"

The three looked at one another in frank bewilderment at what seemed to them absolute freakishness.

"Who is this guy?" burst out Dusty. He directed his question at Seeley.

"Wheeler!" said Seeley bitterly. "The chap Brayle warned us about!"

"Oh, thanks!" chuckled Lee. "Just right! That makes me certain! I must tell about him; and Gip, too." He again reached for the train wire key.

"Tom," he said to the man at Gray Junction, "there's a man they call Gip riding on Ninety-Two. Grab him when he gets into the yards there. And call Powell on the 'phone. Tell him to see that Brayle doesn't get away."

"OK," said Dispatcher Tom.

Once more Lee gave his entire attention to the three. And suddenly their utter dejection seemed to arouse again the whimsical streak in him.

"Oh, say, don't be so down-hearted!" he urged them affably. "For three strong badmen who aimed to rob a train, you're the limit! Cheer up! Look on the bright side!" He smiled encouragingly.

"Why," he went on, "it might have been much worse. Suppose I had waited and nabbed you after you robbed Ninety-Two instead of before you could do it? Think of how many more years that would have meant! Come on! You ought to thank me!"

He beamed invitingly at them all.

But not one of them would.

* * *

"WHEELER," said Division Operator Powell, "it's the most amazing thing I ever heard of on the N. & P.! Ninety-Two safely through, and all five plotters in the coop. My hat is off to you!"

It was Thursday morning. Powell and the man from "WN" were in the former's office, seated side by side at his desk.

"It was what you might call entertaining," admitted Lee. "I must say, though, that my greatest satisfaction is over the way it clears up Sam Loomis' troubles. I've an idea he'll be willing to go back on third in a week or so."

Powell puffed placidly at the long cigar he was smoking.

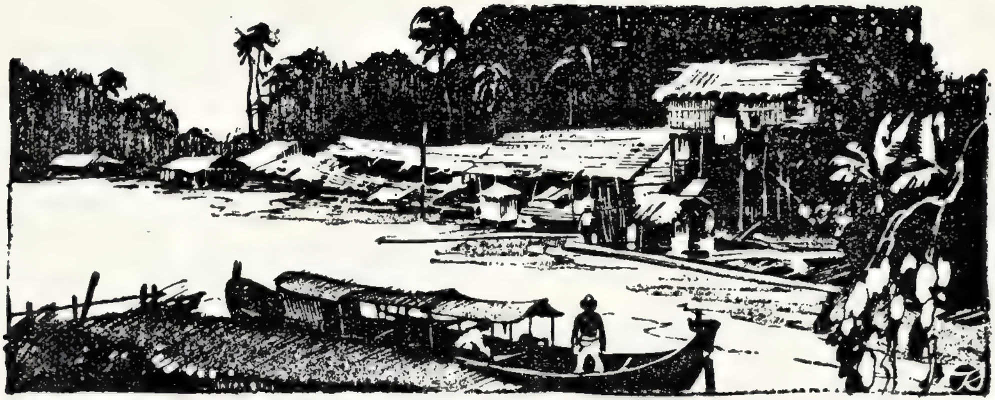
"I don't know," he said slowly. "I've been thinking about that." He paused a moment.

"You see," he then continued, "I'll have to get me a man for Brayle's place. That'll throw first trick at "WN" open. So why not just let Sam stay on there days? That ought to be good and safe. How about it? Is it good?"

Wheeler had looked up quickly, then as quickly looked down. But almost at once his gaze again met Powell's.

"It is," he said.

September 20 is the date for the next issue of *Adventure*. Three times a month now. The third issue will appear September 30.



THE PATHLESS TRAIL*

A Four-Part Story Part I

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "The Barrigudo," "The Bouts," etc.

CHAPTER I

SONS OF THE NORTH

THREE men stood ankle-deep in mud on the shore of a jungle river, silently watching a ribbon of smoke drift and dissolve above the somber mass of trees to the northwest.

Three men of widely different types they were, yet all cradled in the same far-off northern land. The tallest, lean-bodied but broad-shouldered, black of hair and gray of eye, held himself in soldierly fashion and gazed unmoved. His two mates—one stocky, red-faced and red-headed; the other slender, bronzed and blond—betrayed their thoughts in their blue eyes. The red man squinted quizzically at the smoke-feather as if it mattered little to him where he was. The blond watched it with the wistfulness of one who sees the last sign of his own world fade out.

Behind them, at a respectful distance, a number of swarthy individuals of both sexes in nondescript garments smoked and stared at the trio with the interest always accorded strangers by the dwellers of the Out Places. They eyed the uncompromising back of the tall one, the easy lounge of the red one, the thoughtful attitude of the light one. The copper-faced men peered at the rifles hanging in the right hands of the newcomers, their knee-boots, khaki clothing, and wide hats. The women let their eyes rove over the boxes and bundles reposing in the mud beside the three.

"*Inglez?*" hazarded a woman, speaking through the stem of the black pipe clutched in her filed teeth.

"*Norte Americano,*" asserted a man, nodding toward the broad hats. "Englishmen would wear the round helmets of pith."

"*Mercadores?* Traders?" suggested the woman, hopefully running an eye again over the bundles.

"*Exploradores,*" the man corrected. "Explorers of the bush. Have you no eyes? Do you not see the guns and high boots?"

The woman subsided. The others continued what seemed to be their only occupation—smoking.

The streamer in the north vanished. As if moved by the same impulse the three strangers turned their heads and looked southwestward, up-river. The red-haired man spoke:

"So we've lit at last, as the feller said when him and his airyplane landed in a sewer. Faith, I dunno but he was better off than us, at that—he wasn't two thousand miles from nowheres like we are. The steamer's gone and us three pore li'l boys are left a long ways from home."

Then, assuming the tone of a showman, he went on:

"Before ye, girls, ye see the well-known

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Ja-va-ree River, which I never seen before and comes from gosh-knows-where and ends in the Ammyzon. Over there on t'other side the water is Peru. Yer feet are in the mud of Brazil. This other river to yer left is the Tickywahoo——"

"Tecuahy," the blond man corrected, grinning.

"Yeah. And behind ye is the last town in the world and the place that God forgot. What d'ye call this here, now, city?"

"Remate de Males. Which means 'Culmination of Evils'."

"Yeah. It looks it. Wonder if it's anything like Hell's Kitchen, up in li'l old Noo Yawk."

They turned and looked dubiously at the town—a row of perhaps seventy iron-walled and palm-roofed houses set on high palm-trunk poles, each with its ladder dropping from the doorway to the one muddy street. Then spoke the tall man.

"Before you see it again, Tim, you'll think it's quite a town. Above here is nothing but a few rubber estates, seven hundred miles of unknown river and empty jungle."

"Empty, huh? Then they kidded us on the boat. From what they said it's fair crawlin' with snakes and jaggers and lizards and vampires and spiders as big as yer fist. And the water is full o' man-eatin' fish and the bush full o' man-eatin' Injuns. If that's what ye call empty, cap, don't take me no place where it's crowded."

A slight smile twitched the set lips of the tall "cap."

"They're all here, Tim, though maybe not so thick as you expect. Lots of other things too. Who's this?"

Through the knot of pipe-puffing idlers came a portly, coppery man in uniform.

"Well, I'll be—Say, he's the same chap who came on to the boat in a police uniform. Now he's in army rig," the light-haired member of the trio exclaimed. "Oh Lordy, I've got it! He's the police force and the army! The whole blooming works! Ha!"

Tim snickered and stepped forward.

"Hullo, buddy," he greeted. "What's on yer mind?"

"*Boa dia, senhor,*" responded the official affably.

With the words he deftly slipped an arm around Tim's waist and lifted the other hand toward his shoulder. But that hand stopped short, then flew wildly out into the air.

Tim gave a grunt and a heave. The official went skidding and slithering six feet through the mud, clutching at nothing and contorting himself in a frantic effort to keep from sprawling in the muck. By a margin thin as an eyelash he succeeded in preserving his balance and stood where he stopped, amazement and anger in his face.

"Lay off that stuff!" growled Tim, head forward and jaw out. "If ye want trouble come and git it like a man, not sneak up with a grin and then clinch. Don't reach for no knife now, or I'll drill ye——"

"Tim!" barked the black-haired one. "Ten*shun*!"

Automatically Tim's head snapped erect and his shoulders went back. He relaxed again almost at once. But in the meantime the tall man had stepped forward and faced the raging representative of the Government of Brazil.

"Pardon, comrade," he said with an engaging smile. "My friend is a stranger to Brazil and not acquainted with your manner of welcome. In our own country men never put the arm around each other except in combat. He has been a soldier. You are a soldier. So you can understand that a fighting man may be a little abrupt when he does not understand."

The smile, the apology, and most of all the subtle flattery of being treated as an equal by a man whose manner betokened the North American Army officer, mollified the aggrieved official at once. The hot gleam died out of his eyes. Punctiliously he saluted. The salute was as punctiliously returned.

"It is forgotten, *capitao*. As the *capitao* says, we soldiers are sometimes overquick. I come to give you welcome to Remate de Males. My services are at your disposal."

"We thank you. Why do you call me *capitao?*"

"My eyes know a captain when they see him."

"But this is not a military expedition, my friend. Nor are any of us soldiers now—though we all have been."

"Once a *capitao*, always a *capitao*," the Brazilian insisted. Then he hinted: "If the *capitao* and his friends wish to call upon the *superintendente* they will find him in the *intendencia*, the blue building beyond the hotel. It will soon be closed for the day."

The tall American's keen gray eyes roved down the street to the weather-beaten house whose peeling walls once might have been blue. He nodded shortly.

"Better go down there," he said. "Come on, Merry. Tim, stick here and keep an eye on the stuff. And don't start another war while we're gone."

"Right, cap." Tim deftly swung his rifle to his right shoulder. "I'll walk me post in a milit'ry manner, keepin' always on the alert and observin' everything that takes place within sight or hearin', accordin' to Gin'ral Order Number Two. There won't be no war unless somebody starts somethin'. Hey there, buddy, would ye smoke a God's-country cigaret if I give ye one?"

"*Si*," grinned the soldier-policeman, all animosity gone. And as the other two men tramped away through the mud they also grinned, looking back at the North and the South American pacing side by side in sentry-go, blowing smoke and conversing like brothers in arms.

"Tim likes to remember his general orders, but he's forgotten Number Five," laughed the blond man.

"Five? 'To talk to no one except in line of duty'. Don't need it here, Merry."

"Nope. The *entente cordiale* is the thing. Here's hoping nobody makes Tim remember his 'Gin'ral Order Number Thirteen' while we're gone."

He of the black hair smiled again as his mate, mimicking Tim's gruff voice, quoted:

"'Gin'ral Order Number Thirteen: In case o' doubt, bust the other guy quick.'"

CHAPTER II

AT SUNDOWN

PAST the loungers in the street, past others in the doorways, past dogs and goats and children, the pair marched briskly to the faded blue house whence the federal superintendent ruled the town with tropic indolence. There they found a thin, fever-worn, gravely courteous gentleman awaiting them.

"Sit, *senhores*," he urged, with a languid wave of the hand toward chairs. "I am honored by your visit, as is all Remate de Males. In what way can I serve you?"

The blond answered.

"We have come, sir, both for the pleasure of making your acquaintance and for a little information. First permit me to introduce my friend Mr. Roderick McKay, late a captain of the United States Army. I am Meredith Knowlton. There is a third member of our party, Mr. Timothy Ryan, who remained on the river-bank to talk with—er—a soldier of Brazil."

The federal official nodded, a slight smile in his eyes.

"We are here ostensibly for exploration," Knowlton continued candidly, "but actually to find a certain man. I think it quite probable that we shall have to do considerable exploring before finding him."

"Ah," the other murmured shrewdly. "It is a matter of police work, perhaps?"

"No—and yes. The man we seek is not wanted by the law and yet he is. He has committed no crime and so can not be arrested. But the law wants him badly because the settlement of a certain big estate hinges upon the question of whether he is alive or dead. If alive, he is heir to more than a million. If not—the money goes elsewhere."

"Ah," repeated the official, thoughtfully.

"I might add," McKay broke in with a touch of stiffness, "that neither I nor either of my companions would profit in any way by this man's death. Quite the contrary."

"Ah," reiterated the other, his face clearing. "You are commissioned, perhaps, to find and produce this man."

"Exactly," Knowlton nodded. "From our own financial standpoint he is worth much more alive than dead. On the other hand, any absolute proof of his death—proof which would stand in a court of law—is worth something also. Our task is to produce either the man himself or indisputable proof that he no longer lives.

"The man's name is David Dawson Rand. If alive, he now is thirty-six years old. Height five feet nine. Weight about one hundred and sixty. Hair dark, though not black. Eyes grayish-green. Chief distinguishing marks are the green eyes, a broken nose—caused by being struck in the face by a baseball—and a patch of snow-white hair the size of a thumb-ball, two inches above the left ear. Accustomed to having his own way, not at all considerate of others. Yet not a bad fellow as men go—merely a man spoiled by too much mothering in boyhood and by the fact that he never had to work. This is he."

From a breast pocket he drew a small grain-leather note-book, from which he extracted an unmounted photograph. The superintendent looked into the pictured face of a full-cheeked, wide-mouthed, square-jawed man with a slightly blasé expression and a half-cynical smile. After studying it a minute he nodded and handed it back.

"As you say, *senhor*, a man who never has had to work."

"Exactly. For five years this man has been regarded as dead. It was his habit to start off suddenly for any place where his whims drew him, notifying nobody of his departure. But a few days later he would always write, cable or telegraph his relatives, so that his general whereabouts would soon become known. On his last trip he sent a radio message from a steamer out at sea, saying he was bound for Rio Janeiro. That was the last ever heard from him."

"Rio is far from here," suggested the Brazilian.

"Just so. We look for Rand at the headwaters of the Amazon, instead of in Rio, because Rio yields no clue and because of one other thing which I shall speak of presently.

"It has been learned that he reached Rio safely, but there his trail ended. As he had several thousand dollars on his person, it was concluded that he was murdered for his money and his body disposed of. This belief has been held until quite recently, when a new book of travel was published—'The Mother of Waters' by Dwight Dexter, an explorer of considerable reputation."

The Brazilian's brows lifted.

"Senhor Dexter? I remember Senhor Dexter. He stopped here for a short time, ill with fever. So he has published a book?"

"Yes. It deals mainly with his travels and observations in Peru, along the Marañon, Huallaga, and Ucayali. But it includes a short chapter regarding the Javary, and in that chapter occurs the following, which I have copied *verbatim*."

From the note-book he read:

> "It falls to the lot of the explorer at times to meet not only hitherto unclassified species of fauna and flora, but also strange specimens of the *genus homo*. Such a creature came suddenly upon my camp one day just before a serious and well-nigh fatal attack of fever compelled me to relinquish my intention to proceed farther up the Javary.
>
> "While my Indian cook was preparing the afternoon meal, out from the dense jungle strode a bearded, shaggy-haired, painted white man, totally nude save for a narrow breech-clout and a quiver containing several long hunting-arrows. In one hand he carried a strong bow of really excellent workmanship. This was his only weapon. He wore no ornament, unless streaks of brilliant red paint be considered ornaments. He was as wild and savage in appearance and manner as any cannibal Indian. Yet he was indubitably white.
>
> "To my somewhat startled greeting he made no response. Neither did he speak at any time during his unceremonious visit. Bolt upright, he stood beside my crude table until the Indian stolidly brought in my food. Then, without a by-your-leave, the wild man rapidly wolfed down the entire meal, feeding himself with one hand and holding his bow ready in the other. Though I questioned him and sought to draw him into conversation, he honored me with not so much as a grunt or a gesture. When the table was bare he stalked out again and vanished into the dim forest.
>
> "After he had gone my Indian urged that we leave the place at once. The man, he said, was "The Raposa"—a word which denotes a species of wild dog sometimes found on the upper Amazon. He knew nothing of this Raposa except that he apparently belonged to a wild tribe living far back in the forest, perhaps allied with the cannibal Mayorunas, who were very fierce; and that he appeared sometimes at Indian settlements where, without ever speaking, he would help himself to the best food and then leave. My man seemed to fear that now some great misfortune would come to us unless we shifted our base. When the fever came upon me soon afterward, the superstitious fellow was convinced that the illness was attributable directly to the visit of the human 'wild dog.'
>
> "Aside from the nudity and barbarism of the mysterious stranger, certain personal peculiarities struck me. One was that his eyes were green. Another was a streak of snow-white hair above one ear. Furthermore, the red paint on his body outlined his skeleton. His ribs, spine, arm and leg-bones all were portrayed on his tanned skin by those brilliant red streaks. In this connection my Indian asserted that in the tribe to which The Raposa probably belonged it was the custom to preserve the bones of the dead and to paint them with this same red dye, after which the bones were hung up in the huts of the deceased instead of being given burial. Beyond this my informant knew nothing of the 'Red Bone' people, except that to enter their country was death."

Knowlton returned the book to his pocket and carefully buttoned the flap.

"When that appeared," he continued, "efforts were made to get hold of Dexter with the idea of showing him the photograph of the missing man and learning any additional details. Unfortunately, by the time the book was published Dexter had gone to Africa to seek a race of dwarfs said to exist in the Igidi Desert; and thus was totally out of reach. Then we were called upon to follow up this clue and find the Raposa if possible. Men with green eyes and patches of white hair above one ear are not common. So, though our knowledge of this strange wild man is confined to those few words of Dexter's, we are here to learn more of him and to get him if we can."

HE LOOKED expectantly at the official. The latter, after staring out through the doorway for a time, shook his head slightly.

"Something of this Raposa and of those red-streaked people has come to my ears, *senhores*, but only as rumors," he said slowly. "And one does not place great faith in rumors. Yet I have repeatedly been surprized to learn, after dismissing a story as an empty Indian tale, that the tale was true.

"Of the Mayorunas more is known. They are eaters of human flesh, inhabiting both sides of the Javary, deadly when angered and very easily angered. Their country is not many days distant from here, but as they never attack us we do not attack them. It is an armed neutrality, as you *senhores* would say. True, we have to be careful in drinking water, for they sometimes poison the streams against real or imaginary enemies, and the poisoned waters flow down to us, causing those who drink it to die of a fever like the typhoid. Yet—" and he smiled—"there is a saying, is there not, that water is made not to drink but to bathe in?"

Knowlton laughed. McKay's eyes twinkled.

"I'm sorry to say that water's about all a fellow can get to drink in the States now," the blond man said ruefully. "That is, of course, unless a man knows where to go."

"*Si?* It is a pity. But here in Brazil one need not drink water unless he wishes and often it is better not to. Of the Mayorunas, *senhor*—you do not intend to go among them seeking this wild man of the red bones? If you should do so it would be a matter of regret to me."

"Meaning that we should not come out again? That's a risk we have to face. We go wherever it is necessary."

"I am sorry. I regret also that I can give you no definite information. Yet I wish you all success, *senhores*, and a safe return. This much I can do, and gladly will do: I can send word to another white man who now is in the town and who knows much of the upper river. He may be able to assist you and without doubt will be eager to do so. He is staying at the hotel, just below here—Senhor Schwandorf."

The eyes of the two Americans narrowed. The official coughed.

"Senhor McKay has been a soldier. And Senhor Knowlton——"

"I was a lieutenant."

"Ah. But the war has passed, *senhores*. Senhor Schwandorf was not a soldier of Germany. He has been in Brazil for more than six years."

"War's over. That's right," McKay agreed. "But don't bother to send word. We'll find him if he's at the hotel. Going there ourselves. Glad to have met you, sir. Good luck!"

"And to you also luck, *capitao* and *tenente*," smiled the official.

McKay and Knowlton strode out.

"Guess this is the hotel," hazarded McKay, glancing at a house which rose slightly above the others. "I'll go in and charter rooms. You get Tim and have somebody rustle our impedimenta up here."

He turned aside. Knowlton trudged on through the glare of sunset to the river-bank where Tim and the army of Remate de Males still loafed up and down, the admired of all beholders.

"All right, Tim. We're moving to the hotel. No more war, I see."

"Lord love ye, no," grinned Tim. "Me and this feller are gittin' on fine. He's Joey —I forgit the rest of his names—he's got about a dozen more and they sound like stones rattlin' around inside a can. But Joey's a right guy. After me tour o' duty ends he's goin' to buy me a drink and maybe introjuce me to a lady friend o' his. Want to join the party, looey?"

"Not unless the ladies are better looking than these," laughed the ex-lieutenant, moving his head toward the pipe-smoking females.

"Faith, I was thinkin' that same meself. Unless he can dig up somethin' fancier'n what I seen so far, I'd as soon have *mademoiselle.*"

"Who?"

"*Mademoiselle* of Armentières. Sure, ye know that one, looey. Goes to the tune o' Parley-Voo."

Wherewith he lifted up a foghorn voice and, much to the edification of "Joey"—whose name really was Joao—and the rest of Remate de Males, burst into song.

"Mademoiselle of Armenteers,
Pa-a-arley-voo!
She smoked our butts and bummed our beers,
Pa-a-arley-voo!
She had cock-eyes and jackass ears
And she hadn't been kissed for forty years,
Rinky dinky-parley-voo!"

As his musical effort ended, out from the dense jungle hemming in the town burst a hideous roaring howl. Again and again it sounded in a horrible crash of noise.

"Holy Saint Pat!" gasped Tim, throwing his rifle to port and bracing his feet. "Now look what I went and done! Is that the echo, or a couple dozen jaggers all fightin' to oncet?"

"*Guariba,* Senhor Ree-ann," snickered Joao. "Not jaguars—no. Only one little *guariba* monkey. The howler."

"G'wan! Ye're kiddin'!"

"But no, *amigo.* It is as I tell you. One monkey. It is sunset and the jungle awakes."

"My gosh, I'll say it does. Sounds like a Sat'day night row in a Second Av'noo saloon, except there ain't no shootin'. Guess you boys have some night-life too, even if ye are away back in the bush."

"Time for us to move, Tim," laughed Knowlton. "It'll be dark in no time. Joao, will you have our baggage moved to the hotel?"

"*Si, senhor. Immediatamente.* Antonio—Jorge—Rosario! And you too, Meldo—*vem cá!* Carry the bundles of the gentlemen to the hotel, *presto!* Proceed, *senhores.* I, Joao d'Almeida Magalhaes Nabuco Pestana da Fonseca, will remain here on guard until all your possessions have been transported. Proceed without fear."

CHAPTER III

THE VOICE OF THE WILDS

McKAY, eyes twinkling again, awaited them at the top of the hotel's street-ladder.

"Rooms any good, Rod?" hailed Knowlton.

"Best in the house, Merry."

"See any insects in the beds?"

"Nary a bug—in the beds." The twinkle grew. "Didn't look in the bureaus or behind the mirrors. Come look 'em over."

Entering a sizable room evidently used for dining—for its chief articles of furniture were two tables made from planed palm-trunks—McKay waved a hand toward a row of four doorways on the right.

"First three are ours," he explained. "Only vacancies here. Eight rooms in this hotel—the other four over there."

He pointed across the room, on the other side of which opened four similar doors.

"They're occupied by two sick men, one drunk—hear him snore?—and one she-goat which is kidding."

"Huh?" Tim snorted suspiciously. "I think ye're the one that's kiddin', cap."

"Not a bit. I looked. The last room on this side is the Dutchman's and these are ours. Take your pick. They're all alike."

Knowlton stepped to the nearest and looked in. For a moment he said no word. Then he softly muttered:

"Well, I'll be spread-eagled!"

"Me, too," seconded Tim, who had been craning his neck.

The room was absolutely empty. No bed, no chair, no bureau, no rug—nothing at all was in it except two iron hooks. Its floor consisted of split palm-logs, round side up, between which opened inch-wide spaces. Its walls were rusty corrugated iron, guiltless of mirrors or pictures, which did not reach to the roof.

"Observe the excellent ventilation," grinned McKay. "Wind blows up through the floor—if there is any wind—and then loops over the partition into the next fellow's room."

"Yeah. And I'll say any guy that drops his collar-button is out o' luck. It goes plunk into the mud, seven foot down under the house. But say, cap, how the heck do we sleep? Hang ourselves up on them hooks?"

"Exactly."

"Kind o' rough on a feller's shirt, ain't it? And the shirt would likely pull off over yer head before mornin'."

"Yes. Probably would. But the secret is this—you're supposed to hang your hammock on those hooks. You provide the hammock. The hotel provides the hooks. What more can you ask of a modern hotel?"

"Huh! And if a guy wants a bath, there's the river, all full o' 'gators and cattawampuses and things. And if ye eat, I s'pose ye rustle yer own grub and pay for eatin' it off that slab table there. There's jest one thing ye can say for this dump—a feller can spit on the floor. But with all them cracks in it he might not hit it. at that.

Mother o' mine! To think Missus Ryan's li'l boy should ever git caught stayin' in a hole like this, along o' drunks and skiddin' she-goats and—did ye say a Dutchman?"

"German. Chap named Schwandorf."

"Yeah?" Tim's tone was sinister. "Say, cap, gimme the room next that guy. And if ye hear anybody yowlin' before mornin' don't git worried. It won't be me."

"None of that, Tim," warned Knowlton. "The war's over——"

"Since when? There wasn't no peace treaty signed when we left the States."

"Er—ahum! Well, technically you're right. But this fellow may be useful to us. He knows the upper river, they say."

"Aw, well, if ye can use him I'll lay off him. Where is he?"

"Out somewhere," answered McKay. "I haven't seen him yet. Want this first room, Merry?"

"Just to play safe, I'll take the one next the German. And if I hear any war in the night, Tim, I'm coming over the top with both hands going."

"Grrrumph!" growled Tim.

"That goes, Tim," warned McKay. "I'll take this room and you can have the one between us. Here comes the baggage-train with our stuff. In here, men!"

Puffing and grunting, Antonio and Jorge and Rosario and Meldo shuffled in with the boxes and bundles. Under the directions of McKay and Knowlton these were stowed in the bare rooms. Then the four shuffled out again, grinning happily over a small roll of Brazilian paper reis which McKay had peeled from a much larger roll and handed to them. Immediately following their departure, in came a youth carrying three new hammocks.

"Our beds," McKay explained. "I sent this lad to a trader's store for them. He's the proprietor's son. Thank you, Thomaz. Tell your father to put these on our bill and take for yourself this small token of our appreciation."

More reis changed hands. The young Brazilian, with a flash of teeth, informed them that the evening meal would soon be ready and disappeared through a rear door.

"Do they really feed us at this here, now, hotel?" Tim demanded. "Then the goat's safe."

"Meaning?" puzzled Knowlton.

"Meanin' I didn't know but we had to kill our supper and I was goin' to git the cap'n's goat. That is, the goat the cap'n's kiddin'—I mean the goat that's kiddin' the cap—the skiddin' she-goat—aw rats! ye know what I'm drivin' at. Me tongue's so dry it don't work right."

Wherewith Tim retreated in disorder to his room and began wrestling with his new hammock and the iron hooks.

A SWIFT darkness filled the rooms. The sun had slid down below the bulge of the fast-rolling world. Thomaz reentered, lit candles stuck in empty bottles and, with a bow, placed one of these crude illuminants at the door of each of the strangers. By the flickering lights McKay and Knowlton disposed their effects according to their individual desires, bearing in mind Tim's observation that any small article dropped on the floor would land in the mud under the house, whence sounded the grunts of pigs. Their work was soon completed and they sauntered together to the small piazza.

"Nice quiet little place," commented Knowlton. "Make a good sanitarium for nervous folks."

The comment was made in a tone which, in the daytime, would carry half a mile. McKay nodded to save a similar effort. The outbreak of the howling monkey which so startled Tim had been only the first note of the night concert of the jungle. Now that the sun was gone the chorus was in full swing.

Beasts of the village, the jungle, the river, all hurled their voices into the uproar. From the gloom around the houses rose the bellowing of cows and calves, the howls and yelps of dogs, the yowling of cats, the grunts and squeals of hogs. In the black river, flowing past within a stone's throw of the hotel door, sounded the loud snorts of dolphins and the hideous night-call of the foul beast of the mud—the alligator. Out from the matted tangle of trees and brush and great snake-like vines behind the town rolled the appalling roars of *guaribas*, raucous bird-calls, dismal hoots, sudden scattered screams. And over all, whelming all other sound by the sheer might of its penetrating power, throbbed the rapid-fire hammering of millions of frogs.

"Frogs sound like a machine-gun barrage," the blond man added.

"Or thousands of riveting-hammers pounding steel."

"Queer how much worse it is when you're right in it. We've heard it all the way up two thousand miles of Amazon, but——"

"But you're right beside the orchestra now. Position is everything in life."

The double-edged jest made Knowlton glance sidelong at his mate. Of the tall, eagle-faced Scot's past he knew little beyond what he had seen of him in war, where he had met him and learned to respect him whole-heartedly. From occasional remarks he had learned that McKay had been in all sorts of places between Buenos Aires and Nome; and from a few intangible hints he suspected that his "position in life" had once been much higher socially than at present. But he asked no questions.

"Some orchestra, all right," he responded casually. "Plenty of jazz. It'll quiet down after awhile."

For a time they stood leaning against the wall, staring abstractedly out at the dark. One by one the domestic animals ceased their clamor and settled themselves for the night. The jungle din too seemed to diminish, though perhaps this was because the ears of the men had become accustomed to it. At length through the discordant symphony boomed the voice of Tim.

"By cripes, I know now what folks mean when they talk about a howlin' wilderness. Always thought 'twas one o' them figgers o' speech, but I'll tell the world it ain't no joke. Gosh, think of all the things that's layin' out there and bellerin' and waitin' for us pore li'l fellers to come in amongst 'em and git et up."

"You'll find the same things in the cities up home," said Knowlton, a bit cynically. "Different bodies and different methods of attack, but the same merciless animals under the skin. Snakes in silk suits—foul-mouthed alligators in dinner-jackets—hunting-cats and vampires, painted and powdered—and all the rest of it."

"Yeah. Ye said a mouthful, looey. But say, Tommy's shovin' some grub on the table. Mebbe we better hop to it before the flies git it all."

After a glance at the vicious attack already begun by the aforesaid flies, the pair adopted Tim's suggestion and hopped to it. Manfully they assailed the rubbery jerked beef, black beans, rice, farinha, and thick black unsweetened coffee which comprised the meal. All three were wrestling with chunks of the meat when Tim, facing the door, stopped chewing long enough to mutter:

"Dutchland overalls. Here's the goose-stepper."

The heads of the other two involuntarily moved a little. Then their necks stiffened and they continued eating. Tim alone stared straight at a burly black-whiskered Teuton who had halted in the outer doorway. And Tim alone saw the ugly look crossing the newcomer's visage as he gazed at the khaki shirts, the broad shoulders under them, and the unmistakably Irish—and hostile—face of Tim himself.

Catching the hard stare of the red-haired man, he of the black beard advanced at once, his eyes veering to the door of his own room. Straight to that room he marched with heavy tread. He opened the door with a kick, shut it behind him with a slam. The three at the table glanced at one another.

"Say what ye like," grumbled Tim, "but me and that guy don't hold no mush-party. I don't like his map. I don't like his manners. And he looks too much like the Fritz that shot me in the back with a kamerad-gun after surrenderin'. I was in hospital three months. D'ye mind that time, looey?"

Knowlton nodded. He remembered also that Tim, shot down from behind and almost killed, had reeled up to his feet and bayoneted his man before falling the second time. Wherefore he replied—

"He isn't the same one, Tim."

"Nope," grimly. "That one won't never come back. All the same, if you gents want to chew the fat with this feller I'm goin' slummin' with me friend Joey Mouthgargle Nabisco Whoozis. Then I won't be round here to make no sour-caustic remarks and gum up yer party."

"Might be a good idea," McKay conceded.

"There he is now, the li'l darlin'! Hullo, Joey, old sock! Stick around a minute while I scoop a few more beans. Be with ye toot sweet—*vite*—*presto*—P D Q."

Wherewith he demolished the rest of his meal with military dispatch, proceeded doorward, smote the grinning army of Remate de Males a buffet on the shoulder, and vanished into the night. A moment later his stentorian voice rolled back through the nocturnal racket in an impromptu paraphrase of an old and highly improper army song.

"We're in the jungle now,
We ain't behind the plow,
We'll never git rich,
We'll die with the itch,
We're in the jungle now!"

CHAPTER IV

THE GERMAN

THE door of the German's room opened. The German came out and marched to the table. Two paces away he halted and faced the Americans, ready to speak if spoken to, equally ready to sit and ignore them if not greeted. McKay and Knowlton rose.

"Herr von Schwandorf?" inquired Knowlton.

"Schwandorf. Neither herr nor von. Plain Schwandorf."

The reply came in excellent English, though with a slight throaty accent.

"Knowlton is my name. Mr. McKay. The third member of our party, Mr. Ryan, has just left."

Schwandorf bowed stiffly from the waist.

"It is a pleasure to meet you. White men are all too few here."

Seating himself at a place beyond that just vacated by Tim, he continued—

"You stay here for a time?"

"Not long." They reseated themselves. "We go up the river as soon as we can arrange transportation."

The black brows lifted slightly.

"It is a dangerous river. You would do well to travel elsewhere unless you have some pressing reason to explore this stream."

With an accustomed sweep of the hand he shooed the flies from the bean-dish and helped himself to a big portion. Over them he poured farinha in the Brazilian fashion.

"We have. We are seeking a tribe of people who paint their bones red."

Schwandorf's hand, conveying the first mouthful of beans upward, stopped in air. His black eyes fixed the Americans with an astounded stare. He lowered the beans, stabbed absently at a chunk of beef, sawed it apart, popped a piece of it into his mouth, and sat for a time chewing. When the meat was down he spoke bluntly.

"Are there not ways enough to kill yourselves at home instead of traveling to this place to do it?"

McKay smiled. The directness of the man amused him.

"As bad as that?" asked Knowlton.

"As bad as that. Blow your head off if you like. Cut your throat. Take poison. Jump into the river among the alligators. Step on a snake. But keep away from the Red Bones."

"Why?" shot McKay.

"Cannibals—and worse."

"Worse?"

"Truly. Most of the Brazilian savages do not torture. The Red Bones do."

"Pleasant prospect."

"Very. Nothing to be gained among them, either. If you're hunting gold, try the hills over west of the Huallaga. None here."

Knowlton filled and lighted a pipe. McKay slowly drank the last of his sirupy coffee and rolled a cigaret. Schwandorf continued shoveling food into his capacious mouth.

"Know anything about the Raposa?" Knowlton asked.

The Teuton's eyelashes flickered. He ground another chunk of meat between his jaws before answering.

"Of course," he said then. "Wild dog. Sharp snout, gray hair, bushy tail. I've shot a couple of them."

"This one is a man. Green eyes, streak of white hair over the left ear. Paints himself like the Red Bones, as you call them, but is a white man."

"Oh. That one? Heard of him, yes. Wild man of the jungle. Want to catch him and put him in a circus?"

"Maybe. We'd like to see him anyhow. Heard about him awhile ago. Any way to get him that you know of?"

"Might try a steel trap," the German suggested callously. "But I don't know where you'd set it. Best way to get a wild dog is to shoot him, and he isn't much good dead. Or would this one be worth something—dead?" A swift sidelong glance accompanied the question.

"Not a cent!" snapped McKay.

"And perhaps he'd be worth nothing alive," added Knowlton. "But we have a healthy curiosity to look him over. Guess the Red Bone country would be the likeliest place. How far is it from here?"

"Keep out of it," was the stubborn reply.

The Americans rose.

"We are not going to keep out of it," Knowlton declared coldly. "We are going straight into it. Thank you for your assistance."

"Not so fast," Schwandorf protested. "If you are determined to go I will help you if I can. Shall we sit on the piazza with a small bottle to aid digestion? So! Thomaz! Bring from my stock the kümmel. Or would you prefer whisky, gentlemen?"

"Ginger-ale highballs are my favorite fruit," admitted Knowlton. "Can ginger ale be bought here?"

"Indeed yes. At one milrei a bottle."

"Cheap enough. Thomaz, three bottles of ginger ale and one of North American whisky—the best. Cigars also. Out on the piazza."

"*Si, senhores.*"

Schwandorf got up.

"If you will pardon me, I will drink my kümmel. Frankly, I do not like whisky."

"And frankly, we do not like kümmel. All a matter of taste."

"Truly. So let each of us drink his own preference. I will join you in a moment."

The Americans sauntered to the door, while the German strode into his room.

"Blunt sort of cuss," Knowlton commented.

"Aye, blunt. But not candid. Knows more than he's telling."

DISPOSING themselves comfortably, they sat watching the lights of the town and the jungle—the first pouring from windows and open doors, the latter streaking across the darkness where the big fire-beetles of the tropics winged their way. As Knowlton had predicted, the night noise of forest and stream had diminished; but now from the village itself rose a new discord—a babel of vocal and instrumental efforts at music emanating from the badly worn records of dozens of cheap phonographs grinding away in the stilt-poled huts.

"Good Lord!" groaned McKay. "Even here at the end of the world one can't get away from those beastly instruments."

A throaty chuckle from the doorway followed the words. Schwandorf emerged, carrying a big bottle.

"Yet there is one thing to be thankful for, gentlemen," he said. "In all this town there is not one man who attempts to play a trombone."

The others laughed. Thomaz appeared with bottles and thick cups. Corks were drawn, liquids gurgled, matches flared, cigars glowed. Without warning Schwandorf shot a question through the gloom.

"Have you seen Cabral—the superintendent?"

"Yes."

"Ask him about the wild man?"

"Yes."

"Get any information?"

"Nothing definite. He suggested that we see you."

"So."

A pause, while Schwandorf's cigar-end glowed like a flaming eye.

"The Red Bones live well up the river," he began abruptly. "Twenty-four days by canoe, five days through the bush on the east shore. That would bring you to their main settlement—if you were not wiped out before then. They're a big tribe, as tribes go. Ever been here before?"

"No. Not here," Knowlton told him. "I've been in Rio, and McKay here has knocked around in ——"

A stealthy kick from McKay halted him an instant. Then, deftly shifting the sentence, he concluded: "—in a number of places."

"So." Another pause. "Then I should explain about tribes. Tribes here generally consist of from fifty to five hundred or more persons living in big houses called *malocas*. Unless the tribe is very big one house holds them all. There may be any number of *malocas*, the inhabitants of which are all of the same racial stock; yet each *maloca* is, as far as government is concerned, a tribe to itself, controlled by a chief. No *maloca* owes any duty to any other *maloca*. There is no supreme ruler over all, nor even a federation among them. They live merely as neighbors—distant neighbors. At times they fight like neighbors. You understand."

"'When Greek meets Greek—'" quoted McKay.

"Just so. When I say, then, that the Red Bones are a big tribe, I mean that there are about five hundred—maybe more—individuals in their main settlement. They live in huts, not in one big tribe-house like the Mayorunas. They are not Mayorunas, in fact; they paint differently, are darker of skin and more cruel.

"The Mayorunas, by the way, are not so debased as you might think. Though cannibals, they do not kill for the sake of eating 'long pig', like the cannibals of the South Seas. Neither do they eat the whole body. Only the hands and feet of their dead enemies are devoured. These are carefully cooked and eaten as delicacies along with monkey-meat, birds, fish, and other things prepared for a feast in honor of a victory. The eating of human flesh seems to be symbolism rather than savagery. Furthermore, they do not range the jungle hunting for victims. They eat only those who come against them as enemies.

"So it is quite possible, you see, that strangers might go among them and escape death. It would depend largely on the ability of the strangers to convince the savages that they were friends. The difficulty is that the savages consider all strangers to be enemies until friendship is proved."

"A sizable difficulty," McKay remarked.

"Almost insurmountable. Yet it might be done. Mind, I speak now of the Mayorunas, not of the Red Bones. I tell you again that the Red Bone country is closed."

"And where is the Mayoruna region?"

"In the same general section. The Mayorunas are much more widely distributed. They are on both banks of the Javary and extend as far west as the Ucayali.

"Now if I sought to enter the Red Bone region—and again I say I would not—this would be my way of going at it. I would go first among the Mayorunas near the Red Bones and seek to convince them that I was their friend. I would make the Mayoruna chief as friendly to me as possible. I might even take a Mayoruna woman for a time—some of them are handsome, and such a step would make me almost a Mayoruna myself in their eyes. Then I would persuade the chief to send messengers to the Red Bones with word of me and a request that I be allowed to visit their settlement. The request, coming from the Mayoruna chief, probably would be granted. I would then go in with a bodyguard of Mayorunas, do my business, and come out *via* the Mayoruna route."

A thoughtful silence ensued. Bottlenecks clinked against the cups.

"Something in that idea," conceded Knowlton. "A good deal in it. Barring the woman part, of course."

"Aye," spoke McKay, his tone casual as ever. "When you came out what would you do with your woman, *mein herr?*"

Schwandorf, tongue loosened a bit by his kümmel, chuckled.

"Ho ho! The woman? Leave her, of course, when she had served my purpose. Why bother about a woman here and there?"

"I see." McKay's face, indistinct in the gloom, was unreadable, but his tone had a caustic edge. Schwandorf laughed again.

"You are fresh from the woman-worshiping United States, and you disapprove. But this is the jungle and all is different. *Cada terra com seu uso*, as these Brazilians say—each land with its own ways. Perhaps when you have met the Mayoruna women, looked on their handsome faces and shapely forms—they wear no clothing, by the way—you will change your ideas. More than one man along this border has risked his life to win one of those women. But that rests with you. And now if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I have an engagement with a man at the other end of town."

"Certainly. We are indebted to you for your interest."

"It is nothing. Remember that I strongly advise you not to go. But if you will go, I shall gladly do whatever lies in my power to aid you in preparing for the trip. Do not hesitate to call on me."

He passed into the house, returning almost at once.

"By the way," he added, "one of you has the room next mine?"

"I have it," said Knowlton.

"Yes. Are you a good sleeper? I sometimes snore most atrociously, I am told. So perhaps——"

"Don't worry. I can sleep in the middle of a bombardment."

"You are fortunate. Good evening, gentlemen."

WHEN he was gone they sat for a time smoking, sipping now and then at their highballs. At length McKay said—

"Humph!"

"Amen. Pretty square sort of chap, though, don't you think?"

"I'm not saying," was the Scot's cautious answer. "Seems to be trying to discourage us and egg us on at the same time. Something up his sleeve, perhaps."

"Can't tell. But his line of talk rings true so far. Checks up all right with what we've heard about the Mayorunas and so on. And that scheme of working in through the Mayoruna country sounds about as sensible as anything. Desperate chance and all that, but it might work. Say, why did you kick me when I was going to tell him you'd been in British Guiana?"

"Don't know exactly. Had a hunch. Seems to me I've seen that fellow before somewhere, but I can't place him. None of his business where I've been, anyhow. We're boobs from the States hunting for a wild man. That's all he needs to know."

But it was not enough for Schwandorf to know. At that very moment he was on his way to the home of Superintendent Cabral, with whom he had no engagement whatever, to learn all he could concerning the business of these military-appearing strangers; also to impress on that official the fact that he had sought to dissuade them from starting on their mad quest.

And much later that night, when Knowlton was making good his boast that he was a sound sleeper, a black-bearded face rose silently above the iron partition between his room and that of the German. A hand gripping a small electric flashlight followed. A white ray searched the room, halting on the khaki shirt lying over a box. A tough withe with a barb at one end came over like a slender tentacle, hooked the shirt neatly, drew it stealthily up to the top. Shirt, stick, lamp, hand, face all dissolved into darkness.

After a time they reappeared. The shirt came down, swung slowly back and forth, was dropped deftly where it had previously lain. The breast pocket holding the grain-leather notebook and the photograph of David Dawson Rand was buttoned as it had been, and the notebook bulged the cloth slightly as before. But the contents of that book and the pictured face of Rand now were stamped on the brain of Schwandorf. A sneering, snarling smile curled the heavy mouth of Schwandorf. And softly, so softly that none could hear it but himself, sounded the ironical benediction of Schwandorf:

"Sleep well, *offizier americanisch!* Sleep on, poor fool! In time you will wake up. *Ja*, you will wake up!"

CHAPTER V

INTO THE BUSH

SLEEPY-EYED and frowsy-haired, with shirt unbuttoned and breeches and boots unlaced, Tim emerged from his iron-walled cell into the cool-shadowed main room, blinked at McKay and Knowlton lounging over their morning coffee and cigarets, stretched his hairy arms and advanced sluggishly to the table.

"Yow-oo-hum!" he yawned. "Ain't they cute! All dressed and shaved like they was goin' to visit the C. O. And here's pore Timmy Ryan lookin' like a 'drunk and dirty' jest throwed into the guard-house, and feelin' worse. Top o' the mornin' to ye, gents!"

"Same to you, Tim," McKay nodded.

"Who hit you?" asked Knowlton, squinting at bumps and scratches on Tim's forehead.

"Nobody. Couple fellers tried to, but they was out o' luck. Oh, I see what ye mean. I done that meself while I was gittin' to bed."

"Waves must have been running high on the ocean last night. Better drink some coffee. Thomaz, another cup—big and black."

"Thanks, looey. 'Twas kind of an active night, at that."

"I heard you come in," vouchsafed McKay. "Were you trying some high diving in your room?"

"Faith, I done some divin' without tryin', but 'twas ragged work. I pulled a belly-smacker every time. I got to tame that hammick o' mine. It throwed me four times hand-runnin', and the only way I could hold it down was to unhook it and lay it on the floor."

"Sleep well then?"

"I did not. Cap, I thought I knowed somethin' about cooties, but I take it back—I never knowed nothin' about them insecks till last night. Where they come from I dunno, but I'll tell the world they come, and if they wasn't half an inch long I'll eat 'em. They darn near dragged me off whole, and all the sleep I got ye could stick in a flea's eye. Lookit here."

He extended an arm dotted with swollen red spots.

"Ants!" said McKay, after one glance. "Ants, not cooties. They're everywhere. Especially under the floor. That's one reason why folks sleep in hammocks down here. Even then they're likely to come down the hammock-cords and drive you out."

"Ants, hey? Never thought o' that. And I'd sooner spend another night fightin' all the man-eatin' jaggers in the jungle than them bugs. It's the little things that count, as the feller said when his wife give him his fourteenth baby."

He downed the thick coffee brought by Thomaz, demanded another cup, accepted cigaret and light from Knowlton, and sighed heavily.

"Who tried to hit you?" Knowlton persisted.

"Aw, I dunno. Two-three fellers took swipes at me with bottles and things. Me and Joey went to a place where they's card games and so on—only place in town where the village sports can git action. Joey offers to buy and does. Stuff tastes kind o' moldy to me, so I ask have they got any American beer. They have. It's bottled and warm, but it's beer and tastes like home. It goes down so slick I buy another round, and then one more, lettin' in a thirsty-lookin' stranger on the third round. That makes seven bottles altogether. Then I think, mebbe I better pay up now before I lose track. Looey, guess what them seven bottles o' suds come to in American money."

"M-m-m, well, say about three and a half or four dollars."

"That's what I figgered," mourned Tim, "But them highbinders want thirty-two dollars and twenty cents, American gold."

"What!"

"Sad but true. Seems the stuff sells here for four bucks and sixty cents a bottle. Thinkin' I'm gittin' rooked because I'm a tenderfoot, I raise a row to oncet and start to climb the guy. Other folks mix in and things git lively right off. But after I've dropped a couple o' fellers Joey winds himself round me and begs me not to make him arrest me, and also tells me I'm all wrong—that's the reg'lar price. So o' course that makes me out a cheap skate unless I come acrost, and I do the right thing."

"Lucky you had the money on you," said McKay, eyeing him a bit oddly.

"I didn't," chuckled Tim. "All the dough I had was one pore lonesome ten-spot—the one I got from ye yesterday, cap. But I don't tell 'em that. I jest wave my hand like thirty-two plunks wasn't nothin' in my young life, and start to work meself out o' the hole. After the two guys on the floor are brought back to their senses I order up drinks for all hands and git popular again. Then I git out the bones."

"Oh. I see." McKay laughed silently.

"Sure. Remember they told us on the boat that these guys will gamble on anything? And that a feller without no shoes on may be some rubber-worker packin' a roll that would choke a horse? Wal, I make a few passes with them dice o' mine and their eyes light up like somebody had switched on the current. Then I scrabble me hand around in me pants pocket, like I was peelin' a bill off a wad so big I didn't want to flash the whole roll, and haul out that pore li'l ten and ask would anybody like to play a man's game.

"They would. I'll say they would. And they got the coin to back up their play, too. Before I come home I was buyin' beer by the case instead o' the bottle. And it's all paid for, and I got more'n a hundred dollars left, besides givin' Joey a fistful o' money jest for bein' a good feller. This ain't a bad town at all, gents. Outside o' that buckin'-bronco hammick and the man-eatin' ants I had a lovely evenin'."

"How about Joao's lady friend?" quizzed Knowlton.

"Huh? Oh, I didn't git to see her. When bones and beer are rollin' high and handsome I got no time for women. Besides, I found out she was mostly Injun and fat as a hog. Nothin' like that for li'l Timmy Ryan. Oh say, before I forgit it—I asked Joey about this Dutchman here, and he says——"

McKay scowled, shook his head, pointed toward the closed door of Schwandorf. Tim lifted his brows, winked understanding, and went on without a break: "—that this guy Sworn-off is a reg'lar feller and knows this river like a book. Says he's one fine guy and a man from hair to heels."

Following which he grimaced as if something smelled bad, adding in a barely audible whisper—

"And that's the worst lie I ever told."

"We met Mr. Schwandorf last night after you went," Knowlton said easily, drawing down one eyelid. "Very likable sort of chap. He's going to help us get started up-river."

"Uh-huh. When do we go? Today?"

"If possible."

"Glad of it. This big-town sportin' life would be the ruination of a simple country kid like me. Yo-hum! Wonder how all our neighbors are this mornin'—the goat and the drunk and the two sick fellers. Kind o' quiet over that side o' the room."

THOMAZ entered just then with more coffee. Knowlton turned to him.

"Are the sick men better today, Thomaz?"

"Much better, *senhor*," the lad said carelessly. "They are dead."

"Huh?" Tim grunted explosively.

"Dead," the youth repeated. "They were taken out at dawn. Do not be alarmed. It was the swamp-fever, which is not—what you say—catching."

"Humph! Sort of a reg'lar thing to die of fever here, hey?"

Thomaz shrugged as if hearing a foolish question.

"*Si.* Swamp-fever, yellow fever, smallpox, beriberi—today we live, tomorrow we are dead."

"True for ye. They's allays somethin' hidin' round the corner waitin' to jump ye, no matter where ye are. If 'tain't one thing it's another."

Despite his philosophical answer, however, Tim fell silent, his eyes going to the doors of the rooms where Death had stalked last night while he was gambling. Like most men in whose veins red blood runs bold and free, he had no fear of the sort of death befitting a fighter—sudden and violent—but a deep repugnance for those two assassins against which a victim could not fight back: disease and poison. The Brazilian youth's nonchalant fatalism aroused him to the fact that here both those forms of death were very near him; the one in the air, the other on the ground: fever and snakes.

For the moment he was depressed. Then curiosity awoke.

"If this here, now, Javary fever ain't catchin' how does a feller git it?"

"Mosquitoes," McKay enlightened him. "The Anopheles. It bites a man who has fever, then bites a well man and leaves the fever in him. Inside of ten days he's sick, unless he takes a huge dose of quinin right away. Mosquito attacks perpendicular to the skin. That is, it stands on its head. If you ever notice one of them biting that way get busy with the quinin."

"Huh! Fat chance a feller's got o' seein' jest how all these bugs bite him. And one muskeeter standin' on its head does all that, hey?"

"So they say. Also they say only the female bites."

"Yeah. I believe it. I been stung more'n once by females before now. How about the yeller fever? Git that the same way?"

"Same way, only a different mosquito—the Stegomyia. When you begin to vomit black you're gone. And if you get beriberi you're gone too. First symptoms of that are numbness of the fingers and toes. Muscular paralysis goes on until your heart stops."

"Uh-huh. Nice cheerful place to die in, this Ammyzon jungle. Aw well, what's the odds?"

Wherewith he inhaled more coffee, flipped his cigaret-butt at a small lizard on the floor not far away, yawned once more, and swaggered out to the piazza, bawling:

"And when I die
Don't bury me a-tall
But pickle me bones
In alky-hawl——"

When his roar had subsided and the two former officers had sat silent a moment smiling over his nocturnal adventures, the door of Schwandorf's room opened abruptly and the German stepped out.

"*Morgen,*" he grunted, striding to the table. "Thomaz!"

"*Si,* Senhor Sssondoff." The youth faded away into the kitchen quarters.

"Always feel grumpy until I eat," grumbled the blackbeard. "None of this coffee-cigaret breakfast for me. A real meal, coffee with gin in it, a cigar—then I feel human. Sleep well?"

His bold gaze never flickered as it encountered Knowlton's.

"Fine. If you snored I didn't know it. Didn't hear the bodies taken out this morning, either."

"Bodies! Oh. Those fellows dead?" He tilted his head toward the doors behind which the sick men had lain. "Glad of it. Best for them and everybody else. Hate to have sick people in the place."

The Americans said nothing. They lit new cigarets and waited for the other to become "human." And, when his substantial breakfast was down, his gin-flavored coffee had disappeared, and his big cigar was aglow, he did.

"Well, gentlemen, have you decided to take good advice and let your Raposa alone?" he asked affably.

"Who ever follows good advice?" Knowlton countered.

Schwandorf chuckled.

"*Niemand.* Nobody. So you will go." He shook his head solemnly. "I have said all I can without offense. But if you persist I can only help you to start. If possible I should like to go with you up the river to the place where you will take to the bush; but I must go to Iquitos, in Peru, on the monthly launch which is due in a day or two so all my business is in the other direction. If now I can aid in the matter of a crew——'

"That is what we were about to ask of you."

"So. Then let us be about it. I have been thinking, since you showed your determination last night, and have made inquiries about men. There are now in Nazareth, the little Peruvian town across the river, several men from whom you can pick an excellent crew. Men of the river and the bush, not worthless loafers like these townsmen here. Men who are not afraid of——or high water, as the saying is. Not remarkable for either beauty or brains, but good men for your work—by far the best you can obtain. I would suggest a large canoe and six or eight of those men as crew."

The others smoked thoughtfully. Then McKay said—

"We should prefer Brazilians."

"Not if you knew the people hereabouts as well as I. It of course makes no personal difference to me what sort of crew you get, but I tell you that these men are best. What does it matter which side of the river they come from? Men are men."

"True," McKay conceded.

"Can't be too fussy here," Knowlton added. "Let's see the men."

All rose. But then Schwandorf suggested:

"No need of your going to Nazareth. Better stay here, unless you want to go through a great deal of ceremonious foolishness over there. It's Peruvian ground, and the barefooted ignoramuses of officials may insist on showing their importance by demanding your papers and all that. I can go across, get the men, and be back here before you'd be half through the preliminaries. Saves time."

"All right, if it's not too much trouble."

"A good deal less trouble than if you went, to be frank. I'm known and I can go straight about the business. So sit down and wait. Thomaz! My hat!"

OUT he tramped to the piazza, where he paused a moment to run a swift eye over the disheveled figure of Tim, who had fallen sound asleep in a chair. Then, without a further word or glance, he descended the ladder and swung away down the street. The Americans, watching him from the doorway, observed that children in his path hastened to get out of it, and that he spoke to nobody.

"Prussian," rasped McKay.

"M-hm. Done time in the Kaiser's army, too, even if he has been here since before the war. But he's treating us pretty white."

The captain made no answer. Their eyes followed the big figure until they saw it go sliding away toward Peru in a canoe propelled by two languid townsmen. Then McKay dropped a hand on Tim's shoulder. The red-lashed eyes flew open instantly.

Briefly, quietly, Knowlton told of what had passed when he napped, then asked what information he had gleaned from Joao.

"He says," answered Tim, "this guy is a queer duck. Been around here quite awhile, but Joey don't know what's his game. He goes off on trips up-river, stays quite a while, comes back unexpected, and nobody knows where he's been or why. He don't use Brazilian boatmen—gits his men on the other side. And the Peru boys themselves dunno where he goes, or anyways they say they don't.

"Two of 'em come over here awhile back and got drunk, and Joey tried to pump 'em, but all the dope he got was that this here Fritz goes away up-stream to a li'l camp, and from there he goes off into the bush alone, and the Peru guys jest hang around the camp till he gits back.

"Sounds kind o' fishy to me and Joey says it does to him too, but he couldn't work nothin' more out o' the drunks because about that time Sworn-off himself comes buttin' in and asks these guys what they think they're doin' on this side the river and they beat it back to Peru toot sweet. He's got their goat all right, and I wouldn't wonder if he's got Joey's too. Anyways, Joey tells me he's off this geezer and advises me to lay off him too, though he can't name a thing against him."

"Queer," said Knowlton, looking again at the canoe out on the water.

"Gun-running?" suggested McKay.

"Nope," Tim contradicted. "I thought o' that, but Joey says they's nothin' to it. They watched this sauerkraut close, and he don't never git no guns from nowheres. Besides, they's nobody up there to run guns to but Injuns, and them Injuns are so wild they don't want no guns; they stick to the bow and arrer and such stuff, which they sure know how to use. Whatever his game is, he plays a lone hand as far's this town knows. Got no pals here, and nobody wants to walk on his corns."

"May be perfectly all right, too," mused Knowlton. "A little gold cache or something—though he said there was none in this region. Oh well, what do we care? We have our hands full with our own business, and all assistance is appreciated."

An hour drifted past. Men of the town lounged by, looking curiously at the strangers, some nodding and voicing a friendly "*Boa dia.*" Women too watched them from windows and doors, and children slyly peeped around corners until something more important—such as a cat, a goat, or a gorgeous butterfly—came their way. Tim went inside and slicked up a bit by buttoning and lacing his clothes and combing his rebellious hair. At length a long boat put out from the farther shore and came surging across the sun-gleaming river.

"Handle themselves well," McKay approved, noting the easy grace of the crew. In the bow a tall slender fellow stood with arms folded, balancing himself to the sway of the rather clumsy craft and watching the water ahead. In the stern, on a little platform whence he could look over the heads of the others and catch any signal from the lookout, a squat dark-faced steersman lounged against his crude tiller. Between these two the paddlers stood, each with one foot on the bottom of the long dugout and the other on the gunwale, swinging in nonchalant unison as their blades moved fore and aft. Under the curving roof of a rough-and-ready cabin, open at the sides to allow free play of air, Schwandorf lolled like some old-time barbarian king.

Down to the landing-place trudged the three Americans, and there the employers and the prospective employees looked one another over with interest. Eight men had come with Schwandorf, and a hard gang they were. The bowman, hawk-nosed, slant-eyed, black-mustached, with hairy chest showing under his unbuttoned cotton shirt, had the face and bearing of a buccaneer chieftain; and the effect was intensified by a flaring red handkerchief around his head and the haft of a knife protruding from his waistband.

The rowers behind him, though of varying degrees of swarthiness and height, all had the same sinewy build, the same bold stare, the same devil-may-care insolence of manner; and though none but the lookout wore the piratical red around his brow, more than one knife-hilt showed at their waists.

The steersman, whose copper-brown skin and flat face betokened a heavy strain of Indian blood, gazed stolidly at the Americans with the unwinking, expressionless eyes of a snake. Back into the minds of McKay and Knowlton came Schwandorf's words—

"Men not afraid of—— or high water." They looked it.

"Here they are," announced the German, stepping ashore deliberately. "Jose, the *puntero*—" His hand indicated the lookout "—Francisco, the *popero*—" pointing to the steersman "—and six *bogas*. Good men."

McKAY ran a cold eye along the line of faces, his gaze plumbing each. Under that chill scrutiny the third man's stare wavered and dropped. That of the next also veered aside. The rest fronted him eye to eye.

"Two of them will not do," he asserted in the brusk tone of a captain inspecting his company. "Numbers Three and Four—fall out!"

Literal obedience would have put Three and Four into the river, wherefore they stood fast. But, though they did not quite understand the meaning of the words, they grasped the fact that they were not wanted. One laughed impudently, the other slid a poisonous glance at the bleak-faced officer. The squat Francisco scowled. So did Schwandorf.

"No man who cannot look me in the eye is needed on this trip," McKay declared. "Also, six men are enough. If necessary we will bear a hand at the paddles ourselves. Jose, you have been told by Senhor Schwandorf what we want?"

"*Si.*"

"You can start at once?"

"*Si.*"

"What pay?"

"We leave that to you."

"Um. A dollar a day for each man?"

"Money or goods?"

"American gold."

"*Si. Bueno.*"

"Very well. Take those two men back to Nazareth, get what belongings you need, return here and report to me at the hotel. I am captain. Understand?"

"*Si, capitan.*"

"All right. On your way!"

As the boat drew out the two rejected men bade the Americans an ironical *adios*, and one spat in the stream. In the faces of the others, however, showed something like respect for the crisp-spoken captain, and Jose snarled something at the ill-mannered Three and Four.

"You might need those men," rumbled Schwandorf.

"Guess not," McKay answered serenely, turning toward the hotel. "Come on, boys. Let's get our stuff ready to ride."

Less than two hours later their rooms were vacant, their duffel was stowed in the long dugout, the Peruvian crew stood arrogantly eyeing the Brazilians who had gathered to witness the departure and the Americans were bidding good-by to Remate de Males in general and its German resident in particular.

"Mr. Schwandorf, we thank you for your efficient said," aid Knowlton, extending a hearty hand. "You have helped us to get going with all dispatch, and we trust that we can repay the favor soon."

"You owe me no thanks," was the curt reply. "I would expect you to do as much for me if our positions were reversed. I wish you luck."

"Get aboard, Tim!" McKay ordered, setting the example himself.

Tim obeyed, first giving the important Joao d'Almeida Magalhaes Nabuco Pestana da Fonseca a real American hand-grip and getting in return a double embrace from that worthy official. Whereafter he winked and grinned expansively at several women garbed in violent hues of red, yellow and green, frowned slightly at Schwandorf, lighted the last cigar he was to smoke for many a long day, and, as the dugout began to move, erupted into a more or less musical farewell to the females of the species.

"The Yanks are goin' away,
  Pa-a-arley-voo!
They're movin' on today,
  Pa-a-arley-voo!
The Yanks are goin' away, they say,
Leavin' the girls in a heartless way,
  Rinky dinky-parley-voo!"

With one final wave of his cigar to the gesticulating Joao and the grinning women he turned his back on the town and faced the little-known river and the inscrutable jungle. But neither his eyes nor his thoughts traveled beyond the bow of the boat. Through narrowed lids he studied the swaying paddlers and the piratical Jose. And in his mind echoed the whispered warning of Joao, delivered during the effusive embrace at parting.

"Comrade, watch those——*Peruanos!*"

CHAPTER VI

IN THE NIGHT WATCH

DAY by day the long canoe crawled into the vast unknown. Day by day the down-flowing jungle river pushed steadily, sullenly against its prow as if striving to repel the invasion of its secret places by the fair-skinned men of another continent. Day by day it slid past in resentful impotence, conquered by the swinging blades of the Peruvian *bogas*. And day by day the close companionship of canoe and camp seemed to weld the voyagers into one compact unit.

Through hours of blazing sun, when the mercury of the thermometer which Knowlton had hung inside the shady *toldo* cabin fluctuated between 100 and 110 degrees, the hardy crew forged on. Through drenching rains they still hung doggedly to their work, suspending it only when the water fell in such drowning quantities that they were forced to tie up hastily to shore and seek cover in order to breathe.

When sunset neared they picked with unerring eye a spot fit for camping, attacked the bush with whirling machetes, cleared a space, threw up pole frameworks, swiftly thatched them with great palm-leaves, and thus created from the jungle crude but efficient huts—one for themselves and one for their *patrones*.

When night had shut down and all hands squatted around the fire in a nightly smoke-talk they regaled their employers with wild tales of adventures in bush and town, some of which were not at all polite but all of which were mightily interesting. And despite all discomforts, fatigue and the minor incidents and accidents which often lead fellow-travelers in the wilderness to bickering and bitterness, no friction developed between the men of the North and the men of the South.

Not that the Peruvians were at all obsequious or servile. They were a reckless, lawless, godless gang, perpetually bearing themselves with the careless insolence which had characterized them at first, blasphemous of speech toward one another—but never toward the North Americans.

Disputes arose among them with volcanic suddenness, and more than once knives were half-drawn, only to be slipped back under the tongue-lashing of the hawk-nosed *puntero* Jose, who condemned the disputants completely and promised to cut out the bowels of any man daring to lift his blade clear of its sheath.

Five minutes afterward the fire-eaters would be on as good terms as ever, shrugging and grinning at their passengers—particularly Tim, who, shaking his head disgustedly, would grumble:

"Aw pickles! Another frog-fight gone bust!"

Yet Tim, for all his disparagement of these abortive spats, knew full well that any one of them held the makings of a deadly duel, and that Jose's lurid threats were no mere Latin hyperbole. He realized that the red-crowned bowman ruled his crew exactly as any of the old-time buccaneers whom he resembled had governed their freebooting gangs—by the iron hand; and that though these men sailed no Spanish Main and flew no black flag, the iron-hand government was needed.

He saw also that the rough-and-ready courtesy of this crowd toward their passengers was due largely to the attitude of Captain McKay, who had enforced their respect at the start by his soliderly bearing and retained it ever since by his military management.

For the captain, experienced in directing men, conducted himself at all times as a commanding officer should; he saw all, said little, treated Jose as a subordinate officer, and left the handling of the crew entirely to him. His aloofness forestalled any of that familiarity which, with such a gang, would have led to contempt.

On the other hand, his avoidance of any assumption of meddlesome authority prevented the irritation and dislike which free men inevitably feel for the self-important type of leader. Thus he cannily steered himself and his mates between the two rocks which might have wrecked the expedition before it was well started. And Knowlton, ex-lieutenant, and Tim, ex-sergeant, seeing and understanding, followed his example.

So the days and nights rolled by, the miles of never-ending jungle shore fell away behind and, save for the occasional outbreaks between members of the crew, all was serene. To all appearances the Peruvians were whole-heartedly interested in serving their employers faithfully, and the North Americans were gliding onward with no thought of insecurity. Yet appearances frequently are deceptive.

In the heat of the day—in fact, before the broiling sun neared the zenith—Tim and Knowlton habitually fell asleep inside the *toldo*, not to awake until two hours before sunset, when, according to the routine agreed upon, the night's camping-place would be sought and two or three of the Peruvians would go into the bush with rifles, seeking fresh meat.

McKay never slept during the day's traverse. Nothing escaped his eye from the time when he emerged from his mosquito-net in the misty morning until he entered it again by firelight. The men in the boat; the floating alligators and wading birds of the water; the flashing parrots, jacamars, toucans, trogons, and hummers of the air; the yard-long lizards and nervous spider-monkeys of the tangled tree-branches along shore—all these he watched quietly as the boat forged on. And the sinister Francisco, watching him in turn, and the paddlers throwing occasional glances his way, came to regard him as the only alert member of the trio. Wherein they erred.

The truth was that every one of the three adventurers was on his guard. Tim had not forgotten the last words of his boon companion Joao, and at the first opportunity he had quietly passed on that warning. Moreover, McKay and Knowlton, without discussing the matter, had meditated on the unexpected assistance of Schwandorf, the speed with which the crew had been obtained and the promptness of Jose to accept the first payment offered.

Wherefore it had come about that at no hour of the twenty-four was every eye and ear closed. And the real reason why red Tim and blond Knowlton slept by day was that they thus made up the slumber lost at night.

Not that either of them patrolled the camp in sentry-go. So far as the Peruvians knew, they slept as soundly as McKay. But, lying in their hammocks, they divided the night-watches between them on a schedule as regular as that of a military camp—though the shifts necessarily were longer.

As sunset came always at six o'clock and all hands sought their hanging beds two hours later, Tim's "tour of duty" lasted until one in the morning. When the phosphorescent hands of his watch pointed to that hour he stealthily reached out and jabbed Knowlton, sleeping beside him. When a match flared under the net and the former lieutenant's cigaret began to glow Tim was officially relieved.

NIGHT followed night, became a week, lengthened into a fortnight. Still, so far as the crew was concerned, nothing happened. A little rough banter among them as they smoked their last cigarets, then sleep and snores; and that was all until morning. Men less experienced in night-vigils than the ex-soldiers would have abandoned their watches long before this—if, indeed, they had ever adopted them.

But these three were schooled in patience. Moreover, neither Tim nor Knowlton had ever before penetrated the jungle, and at times the light of the waxing moon revealed to their eyes strange things which they never would have seen by day. So the tedium of the long hours of wakefulness might be broken at any moment.

Once they camped close to a conical hillock of compact earth, some four feet high and almost stone-hard, from which radiated narrow covered galleries: the citadel and viaducts of a community of termites. Tim, still harboring vivid recollections of his ant-battle at Remate de Males—though by this time he had trained himself to sleep in his hammock, where he was comparatively safe—looked askance at it when told what it was, and was only partly reassured by the information that termites were eaters of wood rather than of flesh. After sleep had embraced the rest of the camp he still was uneasy, lifting his net at long intervals and squinting at the moonlit mound as if expecting a horde of pincer-jawed insects to erupt from it and charge him. And during one of these inspections he saw something totally unexpected.

From the black shadows of the forest had emerged another shadow, so grotesque and misshapen that it seemed a figment of indigestion and weird dreams: a thing from whose shaggy body protruded what appeared to be only a long tubular snout where a head should be, and which looked to be overbalanced at the other end by a great mass of hair. It stood stone-still, and for the moment Tim could not decide which end of it was head and which was tail, or even whether it were not double-tailed and headless. Then, slowly, the apparition moved.

Into that hard-packed earth it dug huge hooked claws, and from its tapering muzzle a worm-like tongue licked about, gathering the outrushing ants into its gullet. For minutes Tim lay blinking at it, wondering if he really saw it. Then, picking up his rifle, he slipped outside his net and advanced on the creature.

The animal turned, sat back on its great tail, lifted its terrible claws and waited. Six feet away, just out of its reach, Tim stopped and stared anew. Then he grinned.

"You win, feller," he informed the beast. "What the —— ye are I dunno, but any critter that's got the guts to ramble right into camp and offers to gimme a battle is too good a sport for me to shoot. Help yerself to all the ants in the world, for all o' me. I'm goin' back to bed. Bon sewer, monseer."

Wherewith, still grinning but warily watching, he backed until sure the big invader would not spring at him. Knowing nothing of ant-bears, he did not know it was hardly a springing animal. Its claws looked sufficiently formidable to disembowel a man—as, indeed, they were, if the man came near enough. But when Tim had withdrawn and the sluggish brute had decided that it would not need to defend itself, it sank to all fours and passed stiffly away into the shades whence it had come.

On another night, when Tim slept,

Knowlton detected a creeping, slithering sound which made him slip off the safety-catch of his heavy-bulleted pistol and peer at the hut where slept the crew. No man was moving there. Still the sound persisted. Lifting his net, he spied beyond the hut of the Peruvians a moving mass on the ground—a cylindrical bulk which looked to be two feet thick, and which glided past like a solid stream of dark water flowing along above the dirt. Its beginning and end were hidden in the bush, and not until it tapered into nothing and was gone did he realize fully that he had been gazing at an enormous anaconda. Then he kicked himself for not shooting it. But before long he congratulated himself for letting it go.

Perhaps an hour later, the startled forest resounded with an agonized scream, so piercing and so appallingly human that all the camp sprang awake. The outcry came but once, sounding from some place not far off, near the water's edge, and in the direction toward which the huge serpent had disappeared. Before the watcher had time to tell the others of what he had seen, one of the boatmen discovered the rut left in the soft ground by the reptile as it glided through the camp.

Thereafter, Knowlton kept his own counsel, listening to the excited curses of the men and observing their pallor and their nervous scanning of the shadows. Jose said the screech undoubtedly was the death-shriek of some animal caught and crushed in the snake's tremendous coil. McKay concurred with a nod. And when Knowlton casually said it was tough that nobody had been awake to shoot the thing as it passed the camp Jose emphatically disagreed.

A bullet fired into that fiendish giant, he averred, would have meant death to one or more men; for the serpent's writhing coils and lashing tail would have knocked down the sleeping-hut and shattered the spines of any men they struck. No, let Señor Knowl-ton thank the saints that the awful master of the swamps had gone its way unmolested.

For the rest of that night Knowlton kept his watch openly, accompanied by Jose and three of the paddlers, who refused to sleep again until they should be miles away from the vicinity of that dread monster.

* * *

TWO nights afterward the camp was aroused again. Tim alone saw the start of the disturbance and he kept mum about it because he did not choose to let the Peruvians know he had been on the alert. Out from the gloom and straight past the huts a thick-bodied, curve-snouted animal came charging madly for the river, carrying on its back a ferocious cat-creature whose fangs were buried deep in its steed's neck: a tapir attacked by a jaguar. With a resounding plunge the elephantine quarry struck the water and was gone.

The tiger-cat, forced to relinquish its hold or drown, swam hurriedly back to the bank below the encampment, where it roared and spat and squalled in a blood-chilling paroxysm of baffled fury. And though every man was awakened, not one left the flimsy shelter of his net. Nor did any one so much as speak until Tim, wearying of the noise, announced his intention to "go bust that critter in the nose and give him somethin' to yowl about."

The proposal met with instant and peremptory veto.

"As you were!" snapped McKay. "Let him alone! You wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance in that black bush. A jaguar is bad all the time, and when he's mad he's deadly. Never fool with one of those beasts, Tim. I've met them before and I know what they can do."

To which Jose agreed with many picturesque oaths, declaring that a jaguar was no mere beast—it was a devil. Tim, grumbling, obeyed orders. The jaguar, hearing their voices, stopped its noise and probably reconnoitered the camp. But no man saw the brute, and its next roar sounded from some spot far off in the jungle.

Other things too passed within Tim's range of vision from time to time in the moonlit hours: a queer bony creature which he took for some new kind of turtle, but which really was an armadillo; a monstrous hairy spider which slid like a streak up his net, hung there for a time, decided to go elsewhere, and departed with such speed that the man inside rubbed his eyes and wondered if he was "seein' things that ain't;" a couple of vampires which flitted in from nowhere like ghoulish ghosts, wheeled and floated silently on wide wings vainly seeking an exposed foot protruding from the hammocks, rested a moment on the roof-poles chirping hoarsely, and veered out again into the night.

To Knowlton's watch came a strange owl-faced little monkey with great staring eyes and face ringed with pale fur—one of those night apes seldom seen by man; a small troop of kinkajous, slender long-tailed animals which seemed to be monkeys but were not, and which leaped deftly among the branches like frolicsome little devils let loose to play under the jungle moon; a big scaly iguana, its back ridged with saw-teeth and its pendulous throat-pouch dangling grotesquely under its jaw; and more than one deadly snake and huge alligator, the first gliding past with venomous head raised and cold eye glinting, the second lying quiescent except for occasional openings of horrific jaws.

To the ears of both the hammock-sentinels came the mournful sounds of living things unseen. From the depths beyond drifted the weird plaint of the sloth, crying in the night: "Oh me, poor sloth, oh oh oh oh!" Goatsuckers repeated by the hour their monotonous refrains—*quao quao*, or *cho-co-co-cao*, while a third earnestly exhorted: "*Joao corta pao*—John, cut wood!"

Tree-frogs and crickets clacked and drummed and hoo-hooed, *guaribas* poured their awful discord into the air, and on one bright breathless night there sounded over and over a call freighted with wretchedness and despair—the wail of that lonely owl known to the bushmen as "the mother of the moon," whose dreadful cry portends evil to those who hear it.

Sometimes the air shook with the thunderous concussion of some great falling tree which, long since bled to death by parasitical plant-growths, now at last toppled crashing back into the dank soil whence it had forced its way up into a place in the sun. Other noises, infrequent and unexplainable, also drifted at long intervals from the mysterious blackness. And in all the medley of night-sounds not one was cheerful. The burden of the jungle's cacophonic cantata ever was the same—despair, disaster, death.

Then came the fifteenth day. It dawned red, the sun fighting an ensanguined battle with the heavy morning mists and throwing on the faces of the early-rising travelers a sinister crimson hue. Before that sun should rise again some of those faces were to be stained a deeper red.

CHAPTER VII

COLD STEEL

SOME two hours after the start, while Knowlton and Tim loafed at the fore end of the cabin enjoying the comparative coolness of the early day, another boat hove in sight up ahead—a longish craft manned by eight paddlers and without a cabin.

As it came into view its bowman tossed his paddle in greeting. The Peruvians ignored the salutation. The bowman, after shading his eyes and peering at the flamboyant figure of Jose, resumed paddling without further ceremony, evidently intending to pass in silence. But then McKay arose, waved a hand, and told Jose to steer for the newcomers. Jose, with a slightly sour look, gave the signal to Francisco, and the course changed.

The other canoe slowed and waited. Its men watched the tall figure of McKay. Tim and Knowlton scanned the bronzed faces of those men and liked them at once. The paddlers evidently were Brazilians, but of a different type from the sluggish townsmen of Remate de Males: alert, active-looking fellows, steady of eye, honest of face, muscular of arm—in all, a more clean-cut set of men than the Peruvians. All three of the Americans noticed that no word was exchanged between the two crews.

"*Boa dia, amigos*," spoke McKay. "Who are you and whence do you come?"

"We are rubber-workers of Coronel Nunes, *senhor*," the bowman answered civilly. "We go to make a new camp. This land is a part of the *seringal* of the coronel, and we left his headquarters yesterday."

"Ah. Then the headquarters is above here?"

"One more day's journey," the man nodded.

"I thank you. Good fortune go with you."

"And with you, *senhor*. May God protect you."

With the words the Brazilian glanced along the line of Peruvian faces, and his eyes narrowed. Though his words were only a respectful farewell, his expressive face indicated that McKay might be badly in need of divine protection at no distant date. As his paddle dipped and his men nodded their leave-taking, Francisco the *popero* sneered raucously.

"Hah! Mere *caucheros!* Workers! Slaves!"

And he spat at the Brazilian boat.

Fire shot into the eyes of the bowman and his comrades. Their muscles tensed.

"Better be slaves—better be dogs—than Peruvian cutthroats!" one retorted. "Go your way. And keep to your own side of the river."

"We go where we will, and no misborn Brazilians can stop us," snarled Francisco. To which he added obscene epithets directed against Brazilians in general and the men of Coronel Nunes in particular.

The unprovoked insults angered the Americans as well as the Brazilians. Knowlton leaped through the *toldo* and confronted Francisco.

"Shut your dirty mouth!" he blazed.

For reply, the evil-eyed steersman spat at him the vilest name known to man.

An instant later, his lips split, he sprawled dazedly on his platform, perilously close to the edge. Knowlton, the knuckles of his left fist bleeding from impact with the other's teeth, stood over him in white fury. Francisco's hand fumbled for his knife. Knowlton promptly stamped on that hand with a heavy boot-heel.

"Good eye, looey!" rumbled Tim's voice at his back. "Boot him some more for luck. Hey you! Back up or I'll drill ye for keeps!" This to a pair of the Peruvian paddlers who had come scrambling through the cabin.

After one searching stare into Tim's hard blue eyes and a glance at his fist curled around the butt of his belt-gun, the *bogas* backed up. A moment later they were thrown bodily into their own part of the boat by Jose, who blistered them with the profanity of three languages at once. Then McKay came through and took charge.

"That'll do, Tim! Same goes for you, Merry! Jose, I'll handle this. You Francisco! Get up!"

The curt commands struck like blows. Every man obeyed. And when the squat steersman again stood up McKay went after him roughshod. In the colloquial Spanish of Mexico and the Argentine, in the man-talk of American army camps, he flayed that offender alive. Jose himself, efficient man-handler though he was, stared at his *capitan* in awe. And Francisco, though not given to cringing, skulked like a beaten dog when the verbal flagellation was finished.

Turning then to the Brazilians, McKay formally apologized for the insults to them.

"It is nothing, *senhor*," coolly answered the bowman, though his glance at the Peruvians said plainly that it would have been something but for the swift punishment by the Americans. "Again I say—may God protect you! *Adeos!*"

The Brazilian boat glided away. The Peruvian craft crawled on up-stream in silence.

When the next camp was made all apparently had forgotten the affair. The men badgered one another as usual, though none mentioned Francisco's split mouth; and Francisco himself, albeit sulky, betrayed no sign of enmity. After nightfall the regular camp-fire meeting was held, and at the usual time all turned in. One more night of listening to the sounds of the tropical wilderness seemed all that lay ahead of the secret sentinels.

ASLEEP enveloped the huts. Snores and gurgles rose and fell. Tim himself, for the sake of effect, snored heartily at intervals, though his eyes never closed. Through his mosquito-bar he could see only vaguely, but he knew any man walking from the crew's quarters must cast a very visible shadow across that net, and to him the shadow would be as good a warning as a clear view of the substance. But the hours crept on and no shadow came.

At length, however, a small sound reached his alert ear—a sound different from the regular noises of the bush; a stealthy creeping noise like that of a big snake or a huge lizard. It came from the ground a few feet away, and it seemed to be gradually advancing toward his own hammock. Whatever the creature was that made it, its method of progress was not human but reptilian. Puzzled, suspicious yet doubtful, Tim lifted the rear side of his net, on which no moonlight fell. Head out, he watched for the crawling thing to come close.

It came, and for an instant he was in doubt as to its character; for around it lay the deep shadow of some tree-tops which at that point blocked off the moon. It inched along on its stomach, its black head seeming round and minus a face, its body broad but flat—a thing that looked to be a man but not a man. Then, pausing, it raised its head and peered toward the hammock of Knowlton. With that movement

Tim's doubts vanished. The lifting of the head showed the face: the face of Francisco, the face of Murder. In its teeth was clamped a bare knife.

Forthwith Tim applied General Order Number Thirteen.

In one bound he was outside his net, colliding with Knowlton, who awoke instantly. In another he was beside the assassin, who, with a lightning grab at the knife in his mouth, had started to spring up. Tim wasted no time in grappling or clinching. He kicked.

His heavy boot, backed by the power of a hundred and ninety pounds of brawn, thudded into the Indian's chest. Francisco was hurled over sidewise on his back. Another kick crashed against his head above the ear. He went limp.

"Ye lousy snake!" grated Tim. "Crawlin' on yer belly to knife a sleepin' man, hey? Blast yer rotten heart——"

"What's up?" barked McKay from his hammock.

"Night attack, cap. If ye're comin' out bring along yer gat. Hey, looey, got yer gun on? Some o' these other guys might git gay. They're comin' now."

True enough, the Peruvian gang was jumping from its hut. With another glance at the prostrate Francisco to make sure he was unconscious, Tim whirled to meet them, fist on gun.

"Halt!" he roared. "First guy passin' this corner-post gits shot. Back up!"

The impact of his voice, the menace of his ready gun-hand, the sight of Knowlton and McKay leaping out with pistols drawn, stopped the rush at the designated post. But swift hands dropped, and when they rose again the moonlight glinted on cold steel.

"*Capitan,* what happens here?" demanded Jose, ominously quiet.

"Knife work," McKay replied curtly. "Your man Francisco attempted to creep in and murder Señor Knowlton. If you and the rest have similar intentions, now's your time to try. If not, put away those knives."

"Knives! *Por Dios*, what do you mean?"

"Look behind you."

Jose looked. At once he snarled curses and commands. Slowly the knives slipped out of sight. The paddlers edged backward to their own shack, leaving their *puntero* alone.

"The *capitan* has it wrong," asserted Jose. "We awake to find our *popero* being kicked in the head. We want to know why. If Francisco has done what you say I will deal with him. That I may be sure, allow me to look."

"Very well. Look."

Jose advanced, stooped, studied the ground, the position of Francisco's body, the knife still clutched in the nerveless hand. Tim growlingly vouchsafed a brief explanation of the incident. When Jose straightened up his mouth was a hard line and his eyes hot coals.

"*Si. Es verdad.* Tomorrow we shall have a new *popero.*"

With which he stooped again, grasped the prone man by the hair, dragged him into the moonlit space between the huts and flung him down.

"Juan, bring water!" he ordered.

One of the paddlers, looking queerly at him, did so. Jose deluged the senseless man. Francisco, reviving, sat up and scowled about him. His eyes rested on the three Americans standing grimly ready, shoulder to shoulder, before their hut; veered to his mates bunched in sinister silence beside their own quarters; shifted again to meet the baleful glare of Jose. His hand stole to his empty sheath.

"Your knife, Francisco *mio?*" queried Jose, a menacing purr in his tone. "I have it. It seems that you are in haste to use it. Too much haste, Francisco. But if you will stand, instead of crawling as before, you may have your knife again—and use it too."

Francisco, staring sullenly up, seemed to read in the words more than was evident to the Americans. He lurched to his feet, staggered, caught his balance, braced himself, stood waiting.

"You know who commands here," Jose went on. "You disobey. You seek to stab in the night——"

"Now or later—what is the difference?"

"—and now the boat is too small for both of us." Jose ignored the interruption. "Here is your knife. Now use it!"

He flipped the weapon at the other who caught it deftly. Jose dropped his right hand to his waist. An instant later naked steel licked out at Francisco's throat.

* * *

THE steersman's knife flashed up, caught the reaching blade, blocked it with a scraping clink. For a few seconds the two weapons seemed welded together, their owners each striving to bear down the other's wrist. Then they parted as the combatants sprang back.

Jose sidestepped twice to his right. Francisco, turning to preserve his guard, now had the light full in his face. But the moon rode so high that the steersman's disadvantage was negligible, and the next assault of the *puntero* was blocked as before. And this time the wrist of the *popero* proved a bit the better. He threw the attacking steel aside and struck in a slashing sweep at his antagonist's stomach.

A convulsive inward movement of the bowman's middle, coupled with a swift back-step, made the slash miss by a hair's breadth. With the quickness of light Jose was in again. His knife-hand, still outstretched, turned and streaked sidewise, stopped with a light smack of flesh on flesh. Then it jerked outward. His steel now was red to the hilt.

One more rapid step back, a keen glance at his opponent, and Jose stood at ease. From Francisco burst a bubbling groan. He staggered. His knife dropped. His hands rose fumblingly toward his neck. Suddenly his knees gave way and he toppled backward to the ground. The silvery moonlight disclosed a dark flood welling from his severed jugular.

With the utmost coolness Jose ran two fingers down his wet blade, snapped the fingers in air, and spoke to his crew.

"As I said, we shall have a new *popero*. Tomorrow, Julio, you will take the platform."

A rumble ran among the men. Their eyes lifted from Francisco to the Americans, and in them shone a wolfish gleam. The bowman turned sharply and faced them.

"Who growls?" he rasped. "You, Julio?"

"*Si, yo soy*," Julio answered harshly, fingering his knife. "I will be steersman, but I steer down-stream, not up. Francisco spoke truth. Now or later—what is the difference? Let it be now!"

A louder growl from the others followed his words. One stepped back into the shadow of the hut.

"*Perros amarillos!* Yellow dogs! You go up-stream, fools! The Americans must be taken——"

A raucous sneer from Julio interrupted him. Simultaneously the paddler's hand leaped upward, poising a knife.

"The gringos stay here—and you too, you Yanqui cur!"

The poised knife hissed through the air at Jose.

Out from the crew-house shot a streak of fire and a smashing rifle-report.

Jose dodged, staggered, screeched in feline fury, the knife buried in his left arm.

McKay grunted suddenly, fell, lay still.

"——!" yelled Tim. "Cap's gone! Clean 'em, looey!"

With the words he leaped aside and pulled his pistol, just as another rifle-flare stabbed out from the other hut and a bullet whisked through the space where he had stood. An instant later he was pouring a stream of lead at the spot whence the burning powder had leaped.

Knives flashing, teeth gleaming, the other paddlers charged across the ten-foot space between the huts.

Jose, his left arm helpless but his deadly right hand still gripping his knife, hurled himself on Julio, who had seized a machete from somewhere.

Knowlton slammed a bullet between the eyes of the foremost *boga*, who pitched headlong. He swung the muzzle to the other man's chest—yanked at the trigger—got no response. The gun was jammed.

With a triumphant snarl the blood-crazed Peruvian closed in, slashing for the throat. Knowlton slipped aside, evaded the thrust, swung the pistol down hard on his assailant's head. The man reeled, thrust again blindly, missed. Knowlton crashed his dumb gun down again. It struck fair on the temple. The man collapsed.

Tim was charging across the open at the crew-house. Jose and Julio were locked in a death-grapple. No other living man, except Knowlton, still stood upright. Stooping, he peered into the red-dyed face of McKay. Then he laid a hand on the captain's chest. Faint but regular, he felt the heart beating.

"Thank God!" he breathed.

With a wary eye on the battling Peruvians he swiftly raised the captain and put him into Tim's hammock. As he turned back to the fight Tim emerged from the other hut carrying a body, which he dropped and swiftly inspected. At the same moment the fight of Jose and Julio ended.

With a choked scream Julio dropped, writhed, doubled up. Then he lay still. Jose, his face ghastly, stared around him. His mouth stretched in a terrible smile.

"So this ends it," he croaked, his gaze

dropping to Julio. "*Adios*, Julio! The machete is not—so good as the knife—unless one has—room to—swing it——"

He chuckled hoarsely and sank down.

For an instant Knowlton hesitated, his glance going back and forth between McKay and Jose. Swiftly then he ran his finger-tips over McKay's head. With a murmur of satisfaction he turned from his comrade and hurried to the motionless bowman, over whom Tim now bent.

"Bleedin' to death, looey," informed Tim. "Ain't cut bad excep' that arm. That flyin' knife must have got an artery. Can we pull him through? He's a good skate."

"I'll try. You look after cap. He's only knocked out—bullet creased him."

"Glory be! He's all right, huh? Sure, I'll fix him up. Everybody else dead? I got that guy in the bunk-house—drilled him three times."

"Look out for that fellow over there. Maybe I brained him, but I'm not sure."

* * *

KNOWLTON was already down on his knees beside Jose, working fast to loop a tourniquet and stop the flow from the pierced arm. With a handkerchief and his pistol-barrel he shut off the pulsating stream.

"Yeah, he's done," judged Tim, rising from the man whom Knowlton had downed last. "Skull's caved in. What'd ye paste him with?"

"Gun. Cursed thing stuck."

"Uh-huh. Them automats are cranky. Say, lookit the mess Hozy made o' that guy Hooley-o."

Knowlton glanced at Julio and whistled. Jose's oft-repeated threat to disembowel a refractory member of the crew had at last been literally fulfilled.

But the lieutenant had seen worse sights in the shell-torn trenches of France and now he kept his mind on his work. Wedging the gun to hold the tourniquet tight, he lifted his patient from the red-smeared mud and bore him to the nearest hammock in the crew-quarters. Striding back, he found Tim alternately bathing McKay's head and giving him brandy. In a moment the captain's eyes opened.

"Some bean ye got, cap," congratulated Tim, vastly relieved at sight of McKay's gray stare. "Bullet bounced right off. Here, take another swaller. Attaboy! Hey, looey, we better pack this crease o' cap's, huh? She keeps leakin'."

"Yep. Dig up the surgical kit. And give Jose a drink. I'll have to tie his artery too. How do you feel, old chap?"

"Dizzy," McKay confessed. "What's happened?"

"Lost our crew," was the laconic answer. "All gone West but Jose, and he's bled white. We'll have to paddle our own canoe now."

For a time after his head was bandaged McKay lay quiet, staring out at the tiny battlefield and at his two mates working silently on the wounded arm of Jose. When they came back he spoke one word.

"Schwandorf."

"Yeah! He's the nigger in the wood-pile, I bet my shirt. But why? What's his lay, d'ye s'pose?"

"Perhaps Jose knows," suggested Knowlton. "But he's in no shape to talk now. Let's see, Schwandorf said he was going to Iquitos?"

"Yes. But that doesn't mean anything."

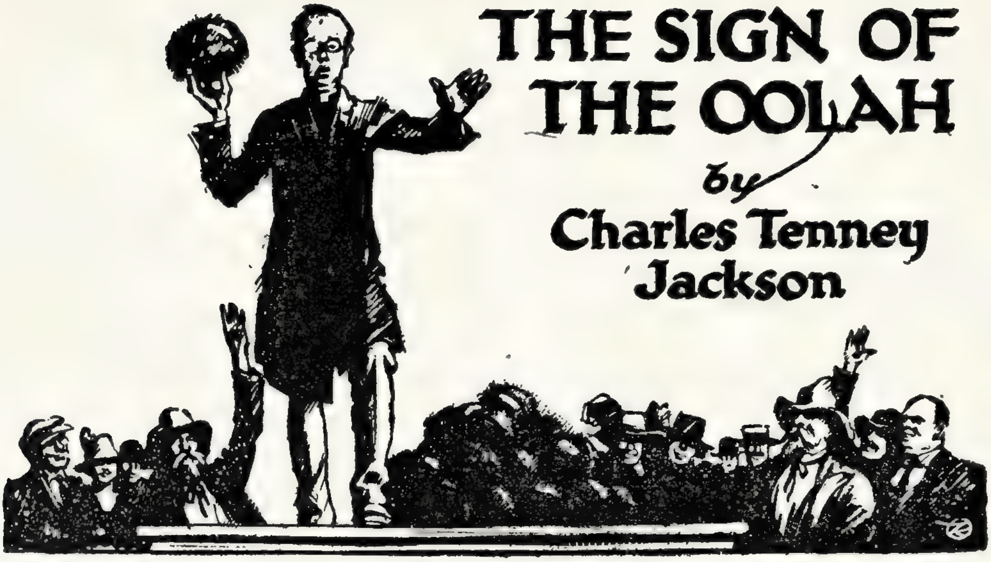
"Probably not. Well, maybe Jose can explain."

There were some things, however, which Jose could not have told if he would, for he did not know them himself. One was that Schwandorf really had gone to Iquitos, where was a radio station. Another was that from that radio station to Puerto Bermudez, thence over the Andes to the coast, and northward to a New York address memorized from Knowlton's notebook, already had gone this message:

> "McKay expedition killed by Indians. Rand search most dangerous but if empowered I attempt locate him for fifty thousand gold payable on safe delivery Rand at Manaos. Reply soonest possible.
> Karl Schwandorf."

TO BE CONTINUED

The 10th, 20th and 30th of the month are now the dates to look for *Adventure* on the news-stands.



THE SIGN OF THE OOLAH

by

Charles Tenney Jackson

Author of "Half-Pint Smith," "Hooley's Hen Hastener," etc.

"WELL, maybe she'll work," concluded Mr. Gilfish expectorating with precision at the Dominick hen which habitually stuck its head through the slats of the Maddox House fence each afternoon when he and Colonel T. Sambola Tunk sought their accustomed cane-bottomed chairs to watch the world pass in review on Main Street; "but ain't folks goin' to think it a trifle strange, you buyin' sixty dozen coconuts and shippin' 'em in Preacher Dick Tuttle's name to this Oriental Bazaar which he's gettin' up for the benefit o' the heathen?"

"Not at all, seh." Colonel Tunk gazed benignly upon the Reverend Richard Tuttle, who was cranking his flivver in front of the post-office.

"Preacher Dick is enthusiastic, seh. He thanked me with fervor for my efforts in the missionary cause. He plans to exhibit the Oriental souvenirs which he brought back from the scene of his labors, in a booth got up to represent a palm-shaded oasis in the desert wastes. And coconuts fit in admirably with his decorative scheme, seh. He'll sell them at the conclusion of the evenin's entertainment, Mr. Gilfish."

"But sixty dozen coconuts—one each for every man, woman and child in Mississippi City, kunnel!" Mr. Gilfish bent lower to Colonel Tunk's ear—"And five dozen of 'em plugged and loaded with popskull, goin' into the First Baptist parsonage! It's unsafe an' unconstitutional!"

"Popskull, seh?" inquired Colonel Tunk with asperity.

"Well, whisky, these days, that gets to Mississippi City is mostly ol' second-run bumblin's out o' some white mule still, an' these hillbilly blockaders ain't satisfied with that. They puts in a jigger o' lye an' black pepper just to make a man feel his feed."

"This present consignment of whisky, seh, is eight-year-old Bourbon. It was duly inspected by Judge Brandagee and myself in Murphy's warehouse in N' Awylins. It was Bat Murphy, himself, a gentleman than which there is no other comparable in fertility of resource, who suggested the coconuts as a means of safe transportation."

"This here Bat is on the level?" inquired Mr. Gilfish eagerly. "These here coconuts guaranteed to hold a pint each, more or less—did you plug 'em, kunnel?"

"We did, seh. We plugged 'em one evenin' with joy and thanksgivin'. We plugged 'em until I had to take a taxi back to my hotel. Coconut meat, seh, lends to liquor a certain suggestion of the Orient, of adventure and intrigue harking back to the days of Haroun al Raschid. A jigger or two, seh, and the true believer can see the fronded palms of the islands of romance liftin' above seas of eternal summer."

"Gosh, that's good—but I trust we never see nothin' else. I don't like this missionary bazaar business. Dick Tuttle's a bearcat at nosin' out blockade. He don't belong in the pulpit nohow."

"It was Rev. Mr. Tuttle's reputation as the leader of the Anti-Bootleggers' League, puttin' him far above suspicion, that led us to consign the coconuts to him, seh. A happy thought of mine, rememberin' this missionary bazaar for which he approached me as a contributor. It fell in exactly with our plans, seh, concernin' the establishment of our lodge of the Arabic Order of the Sons of Oolah."

"You voted me in yet, kunnel?" said Mr. Gilfish cautiously. "I want to be a member in time to get in on this coconut deal—that is, if they get through safe."

Colonel Tunk looked at the first candidate for admission to the Sons of Oolah with distant interest as at a faint-hearted vassal. "You are on probation, seh. The charter members of the first lodge of Oolah consist of Judge Brandagee, Senator Yancey, Major Huckaby, Mr. Pink Garford and myself. You, seh, may be the sixth member. The seventh is yet to be selected, after which the roll will close fo' Mississippi City, Mississippi."

"The Seven Sons of Oolah," sighed Mr. Gilfish. "I guess any more wouldn't be safe, mebbe, seein' that the sole object and purpose of this new lodge is to run blockade into this county an' still maintain f'r its members full reputation an' standin' as upright and law-abidin' citizens.

"But what gets me is the nerve o' you-all to tackle Preacher Dick Tuttle the first crack out o' the box in gettin' liquor across the state line. Dick gets sixty dozen coconuts, innocent as a cottontail rabbit, f'r his heathen bazaar. Five dozen of 'em are loaded with hootch. Of course you expaic' to get the plugged nuts out o' the preacher's hands after he receipts f'r 'em?"

"Certainly, seh. I stipulated that I was to select a few dozen out of the lot fo' personal use. Mr. Tuttle was gratified and overjoyed to assent. The coconuts comin' by the *J. J. Crosby*, this evenin', I merely have to meet the packet at the landin', sort over the crates of coconuts, seh—and leave the balance to the taste of those who prefer to aid the heathen by drinkin' coconut milk."

"Well, it sounds doggone good! Only how you goin' to tell the nuts that been plugged, filled and sealed, seein' that the eyes of 'em been camouflaged over so neat with imitation cork-fillin' that an Ayrab himself wouldn't know it? One coconut looks mighty like another coconut."

"ON EACH nut, seh, destined fo' the sacred rites of the Sons of Oolah, is a secret and mystic symbol which will be entirely unnoticed by the philistines, or even, if seen, will be at once too ordinary and inexplicable to arouse comment."

"A symbol?" inquired Mr. Gilfish, greedily. "Go on—I'm on probation!"

"We have chosen, seh," returned Colonel Tunk with dignity, "fo' the sign of the Oolah, the letter O, upside down and backward."

"O—upside down an' backward?" whispered Mr. Gilfish. "Upside——"

"Seen anywhere, no true Son of Oolah will mistake its significance, seh!"

Colonel Tunk blew a ring of smoke from his cigar. Mr. Gilfish gasped into its dissolving mysteries.

"The Sign of the Oolah, seh—is round like a cork or a bunghole. It has neither beginnin' or end, like the thirst of a gentleman of Mississippi. It recalls the egg, that seat of the mysterious beginnin' of life, which is, besides, delectable in fizzes; and also the serpent, Midgard, which encircled the earth in Norse mythology, but can be a warnin' to the wise Son of Oolah to shun snake whisky which can people the universe with 'em over night; and lastly, Mr. Gilfish, the letter O looks the same upside down and backward as the trail of the weary pilgrim trottin' the hot sands must ever be in the community if he hopes to avoid suspicion."

"Well, say!" exclaimed Mr. Gilfish admiringly. "You vote me in, kunnel! I sure think intellects smart as that can fool any preacher livin'!"

"Thank you, seh," murmured Colonel Tunk. "The sign of the Oolah, seh, will protect our wet goods even if they repose fo' a night in the very tents of the Dry Bedouins of the desert—meanin' Mississippi City, Mississippi."

"Every coconut marked with a little round jigger on the eye has a shot o' hootch," mused Mr. Gilfish. "An' every one that ain't marked can be left for the preacher to sell to the women f'r pie-fillin'."

"Fo' the benefit o' the heathen, seh, whose inner nature the Rev. Mr. Tuttle hopes to touch, enlighten an' dry-clean on the proceeds of this Baptist church bazaar. I approve most heartily, seh, as long as it don't interfere with a gentleman's long-established personal habits."

"Here comes Dick Tuttle now," warned Mr. Gilfish, and settled back in his seat, as the Rev. Richard Tuttle came up the hotel steps, and greeted the two with blithe and confiding air.

"Mornin', seh," responded Colonel Tunk gravely. "I trust the harvest in your fruitful but dusty vineyard is producin' adequate results?"

"Great!" retorted Preacher Dick cheerfully. "Been putting in my own licks on the bazaar decorations, kunnel! You want to see the Arabic booth—rigged up with the old plunder that my friend, the king of Hedjez gave me when I left Aden. Antique matchlocks, spears and scimitars—some of 'em relics of the days of the Bashi-Bazouks——"

"Seh?" queried Colonel Tunk hastily. "The boozooks——"

"Oh, no!—Bazouks! Nothin' doin', kunnel! But you want to drop in tonight. I'll show you a little corner of Araby. The hot sands, kunnel, and a little oasis to rest your caravan. I requisitioned all the cozy corner stuff in town for rugs and to make a tent. The Millard conservatory donated two palm trees, and the drayage company three loads of sand for the desert floor."

"Palms?" ventured Mr. Gilfish. "Coconut?"

"No—cabbage. Colonel Tunk is furnishing the nuts. Great stuff Mr. Gilfish—Coconuts festooned around the Arabic booth and a big pile of 'em to peddle out along with the cakes and ice cream and fancy work—I expect to clean up a hundred dollars for the missionary fund."

"I trust so, seh. The simple heathen soul to whom coconuts mean milk and pie-fillin' needs enlightenment. Heartily, seh, I commend your efforts, even as a blockader——"

"A—a—blockad——"

"A—backslider—" corrected the colonel grandly and with perfect composure. "We shall all be there, seh. I was speakin' to Judge Brandagee——"

"Bring all the old boys!" cried Dick, wiping his perspiring face. "And I hope that steamboat unloads your coconut contribution, kunnel, before it's too late to decorate our little sandy Sahara. Sitting under a cabbage palm, kunnel, you can listen to the grape juice gurgle as Mattie Millard pours you one—or maybe you and I'll crack a coconut or two!"

"Seh!" retorted Colonel Tunk hastily, while Mr. Gilfish gasped.

"But I guess you'd rather take yours home," went on the preacher cheerfully. "Pie-fillin' and layer cake, eh?"

"Some are to be used in our lodge meetin', seh. Palms and coconuts, Mr. Tuttle, the symbols of the mirage toward which our weary pilgrims are trottin' over the sandy wastes. The new order of the Sons of Oolah——"

"Who?" queried the Rev. Dick Tuttle interestedly.

"Oolah, seh. While not absorbed pa'ticularly in pie-fillin', the Sons of Oolah, seh, would be gratified to sequestrate a few of these coconuts fo' their symbolic ceremonies, seh——"

"Sure thing!" repeated Mr. Tuttle, earnestly gazing at the fascinated Gilfish who craned an ear to every word Colonel Tunk uttered. "Oolah? It sounds good to me, kunnel! What's the matter with admitting me? You'll need a chaplain. Oolah—Oolah—Sons of Oolah—sounds good, like a college yell!"

"Seh, the few dozen coconuts we desire," pursued Colonel Tunk evasively, "I might select this evenin', Mr. Tuttle, at the steamboat landin'?"

"Take the biggest. You're mighty generous at that. I want this missionary affair to shake up the old dry bones of the church, kunnel. I'm out for the goods—shake 'em down, roll 'em out flat—the old codgers in this town need a goin' over from a live young man. I'm goin' to make 'em forget I'm a parson and think of me as a business man out to sell 'em something!"

"You have my entire cooperation, seh!" rejoined Colonel Tunk. "We'll all drop in befo' lodge meetin'."

THE two Sons of Oolah watched the earnest young missionary go down the block and again crank his flivver. The parson whistled and sang and joked with passers-by; if there was anybody who could shake down and flatten out the tightwads of Mississippi City, Mississippi, it was Rev. Dick Tuttle.

"If he knew what he was gettin' in them nuts," mused Mr. Gilfish, "he'd whistle! I certainly admire for to see how you handled him, kunnel!"

Colonel Tunk blew his nose and departed as one to whom failure was a stranger. Mr. Gilfish strove to keep up with him for a parting word.

"O—upside down an' backward," ruminated Mr. Gilfish. "Well, I guess even Sheriff Zeb Peters wouldn't see no blockade-runnin' in an O upside down an' backwards, for I cain't see any sense in it myself!"

Colonel T. Sambola Tunk looked at Mr. Gilfish as at one to whom the inner mysteries could no more be revealed than they could to a salt codfish, and Mr. Gilfish shriveled under the silent rebuke. He watched the Colonel mount his buckboard, adjust his panama hat and drive off the river road to the Tunk plantation.

"O—Upside down an' backward—" cogitated Mr. Gilfish. "Makes you think of a bunghole, but I cain't see anything in it. I don't give a durn f'r any Oolahs, but I'd hate to buy coconuts an' get stuck f'r the milk."

At four o'clock Colonel Tunk, seated on the front gallery of his plantation house, heard a series of long toots from the leafy bend of the river. It was unusual for the old packet *J. J. Crosby* to let loose such a jubilant blast, and the colonel wondered.

But later he heard the slap-slap of her stern paddles turning out and up for the Natchez run, and reflected serenely that while he had good assurance that the prohibition officers were watching all importations of groceries and stock for the Tunk plantation store this week, the world could see that the colonel was not delivered so much as a gumdrop either by rail or river. There was nothing untoward in Colonel Tunk's gracious benefaction to the missionary bazaar.

An hour later he drove in town and was where everybody in the county could find him Summer-long; the cane-bottomed chair on the Maddox House porch nearest the drug store corner. Far be it from the colonel to cast an eye on what the drayman hauled from the river landing this trip.

Main Street lay under its leafy peace disturbed only by Doc Horn lugging the mail from the 5:35 train to the post-office, and the Maddox House Dominick hen who stuck her head through the fence and looked at the tacks on the soles of Colonel Tunk's shoes.

But half an hour later when the colonel was reflecting on why Mr. Gilfish, his satellite, was not in his accustomed place on the veranda, he was startled at an unwonted spectacle.

Crossing the railway tracks, turning in from the river road was Stivers' motor truck. On the seat by the driver sat the Rev. Richard B. Tuttle. Back of him stood Sheriff Zeb Peters. Sitting on the tail-gate with his legs swinging was Mr. Gilfish.

And in the truck body rattled and shook and gurgled a low pyramid of brown, hairy, menacing objects, each one of which—there, under the sheriff's foot—seemed to turn accusing eyes upon Colonel T. Sambola Tunk.

* * *

THE procession slowly passed. Colonel Tunk sat rigid but outwardly unperturbed. Mr. Gilfish cast a scared don't-recognize-me look at Colonel Tunk. Preacher Dick seemed happily pleased with all the world.

"Evenin', kunnel!" sang out Sheriff Zeb heartily.

"Evenin'—seh." Colonel Tunk breathed it, slowly relaxing. The outfit chugged on up Main Street. Colonel Tunk watched it fascinatedly. The truck backed up at the church basement door. Out of this swooped a chorusing mob of Boy Scouts, Ladies' Aid misses and workers for the Arabian bazaar.

Delightedly they whooped and fell to unloading Colonel Tunk's gift coconuts out of the truck and down to the lost abyss of the First Baptist basement. The sheriff yawned and watched the procedure. Colonel Tunk felt chills titillate up and down his spine, and started at a touch on his arm.

"Kunnel!" whispered Mr. Gilfish, and sank in his chair. "They got 'em!"

"Got 'em—seh? I passed the landin' and saw no freight there."

"No, that durn fool steamboat captain saw a big snag hangin' in the wharf so he toots and goes on up and unloads the freight at Bigg's Point! I sees what's what, and I follers up the river, and meantime this steamboat man telephones the preacher to come get the coconuts, bein's they were consigned to him. So along comes Dick Tuttle with Stivers' truck just as I was gettin' ready to save 'em——"

"You, seh?" exclaimed Colonel Tunk.

"F'r the Sons o' Oolah, kunnel. Shucks, don't you trust me?"

"What—then?" went on Colonel Tunk with measured reserve.

"Gosh, I done my best, kunnel! Laffed and gagged around there with the preacher while him and Stivers' man loaded on the nuts. I helped 'em load up, but I was sure scared to be seen lookin' f'r one with the sign o' the Oolah. But I climbed on the truck and rode back to town, nearly rackin' my poor old bean wonderin' how to get word to you to head off this nut business before they gets 'em into the church. I almost wept, kunnel, argyin' with the preacher as how you'd be disappointed at not gettin' to sort o' look them nuts over.

"He tells me you can get yours at the church, and while I was fantasticatin' around that, Zeb Peters comes hoofin' out of the crossroads an' the preacher gives him a ride in. Kunnel, I didn't dare to show any more int'rest in them nuts after that than a mud turtle would in a wimmin's fashion book. Trouble was with me, kunnel, I was carryin' a gunny-bag, an' it's just got so some folks in this town cain't carry a tube o' tooth paste without this fool Zeb wonderin' what's in it."

"A gunny-bag, seh?" pursued Colonel Tunk dispassionately.

"Well, jest in your int'rest, kunnel. You plugged 'em, and marked 'em, an'—Shucks—I thought——"

Colonel Tunk waved Mr. Gilfish aside and strode to the hotel steps.

"There goes the last of 'em, kunnel—f'r the benefit of them Bashy-Boozooks, the parson was tellin' of!" faltered Mr. Gilfish. "Seven gallons an' a half, more or less, o' popskull, goin' in the missionary fair; an' when some o' them old ladies git them coconuts home—Oh, Lordy!"

"There'd be a rush to save the heathen such as was never seen since the crusades, seh!"

"Preacher got 'em all—upside down an' backward!" moaned Mr. Gilfish.

"Diplomacy," went on Colonel Tunk grandly. "Finesse, seh, such as common minds cannot fathom!" And buttoning his frock coat, Colonel Tunk departed.

Mr. Gilfish stood watching the parsonage. The truck drove away. The sheriff strolled to the Court-house Square. Rev. Mr. Tuttle disappeared in the basement recreation rooms. Mr. Gilfish nibbled reflectively.

"Finesse," he murmured, "mebbe'll surprize this old fool Tunk! Let's see?—At six o'clock all them Baptists'll be home f'r supper."

* * *

THE Reverend Richard B. Tuttle was perhaps the only citizen of Mississippi City, Mississippi, who habitually dined between six and seven o'clock, and he was seated, filled not only with the tenderest of fried chicken but also the fondest expectations of the success of his entertainment for the benefit of the missionary fund when he happened to glance from the parsonage window to the little church next door.

It seemed that a light had faintly illumined the dusk. In the church basement were twelve gallons of ice cream, ten cases of assorted soft drinks, cakes, sandwiches, fancy work of all kinds; and everything was to be sold for the heathens' good and solace. Therefore visions of predatory boys from the depot gang, perhaps, raiding the contributed edibles, came to Parson Tuttle's mind at once.

The mysterious light flashed once more. Preacher Dick arose alertly.

"Got to see if those kids from across the tracks are loitering around for mischief," he muttered, and went straight across the lawn to the basement door.

"They spoiled the Ladies' Aid sociable by swiping all the ice cream before-hand last spring. And now, when we got all the old backsliders in town like Tunk and Brandagee and that pious old hypocrite, Gilfish, so strangely interested in the heathens' welfare I don't want anything to interfere with this bazaar!"

As he put a foot on the basement stairs, a sound came from the dusk below. It was a soft, elusive *glug-chug* as if some one was shaking a bottle. Preacher Dick peered in curiously. By the foot of the inner stairs was the pyramidal heap of coconuts, the latest contribution to the Cause, and over them bent a figure which held a flashlight that was turned first on one and then another of the brown spheres.

Dick Tuttle tip-toed softly nearer. The intruder picked up one coconut after another, laid them down, reached for others, shook, smelled, listened with intent care and sighed.

"Gilfish!" whispered Parson Tuttle, and stared puzzledly.

Mr. Gilfish was fondly rubbing the eye of a coconut. Upon the brown, soiled surface there appeared a faint round scratch.

"Oolah!" murmured Mr. Gilfish pleasedly. "I guess I better get mine while the gettin's good!"

Mr. Gilfish laid the coconut in a gunny-sack and went on with his obvious labor of love. Parson Dick mused a moment and then came nearer.

"Ahem," he put in gently, "goin' to plant a nut farm, Mr. Gilfish?"

"Wha—say!" Mr. Gilfish rattled around so hastily on the pile of coconuts that the sliding pyramid all but buried his gunny-sack. "Oh, it's you, Dick!" He stood up grinning pleasantly. "I jest thought I'd look in at the bazaar fixin's. Mighty int'restin'. Coconuts make you think o' bammy isles an' monkeys chunkin' 'em at you from the tree tops. Me, I ain't nothin' poetical like Kunnel Tunk, but I'm strong f'r the heathen."

"Oolah," murmured Parson Tuttle mysteriously.

"That's it. The kunnel wanted me to sorteh look over these coconuts, Dick—f'r the new lodge some o' the old parties are gettin' up——"

"Oolah!" repeated Parson Dick ominously.

The silence after that made Mr. Gilfish distinctly nervous. He dusted his trousers and essayed more conversation about the Oriental Bazaar. The one lone nut in his gunny-sack stuck up like a wart on a man's nose. Not for worlds would Mr. Gilfish have claimed that coconut now. He turned his flashlight away from it and backed around to exhibit a sudden fervent interest in the mural scheme of the bazaar.

"Well, say, just look at the palm trees an' all. I reckon the wimmen must have slaved over this decoratin'—hey, parson?"

"Oolah—" whispered the parson sepulchrally, and he moved on to the next booth. "Is that your sack, Mr. Gilfish?"

"Oh, no! Shucks, somebody must have jest dropped it around! Hey—look at these old guns and swords. Well, by Swanny—this beats everythin'!"

"Oolah," said the Rev. Mr. Tuttle at the front door, holding it open, and looking gravely upon Mr. Gilfish. Plainly this was the way out. Mr. Gilfish took it.

"Well, I reckon I got here a little early," protested Mr. Gilfish with a playful grin. "The kunnel an' me'll drop in later, parson!"

"Sure—eight o'clock the doors open," assented Preacher Dick. "Good-evenin', Mr. Gilfish—don't let me detain you!"

When he was quite sure that Mr. Gilfish had gone, Dick Tuttle lit a lamp. He looked about the gaudy *tout ensemble* of the Arabian Bazaar. All there, just as he left it—even his palm-tree oasis in the corner with a striped tent evolved from four lounge covers loaned by the congregation, and with the white sands of the desert on the floor, was undisturbed.

Only that heap of coconuts had to be arranged and Dick concluded that he himself had better make a start. Out of the mysterious gunny-sack he dumped the lone nut that represented the labors of Deacon Gilfish for the heathen's enlightenment.

"Funny about Gilfish," mused Preacher Dick, "he's trailed me around ever since I took these coconuts off the steamboat. Of course Colonel Tunk is free to cart away all the coconuts he wants for his new lodge meetin', but this Gilfish hornin' in——"

He stopped and shook the coconut by his ear. A low, alluring Oriental seductiveness was in that gurgle. As Gilfish had done the preacher listened, smelled, shook, and then he pecked away at the coconut's eye. And presently he sat down on the heap of coconuts and sighed. He picked up another of the nuts and then another, and then he fell to gathering them and examining with sighs and murmurs.

With his pocketknife he presently extracted a small cork from one. The end of it was brown-stained and molded so that not a crevice showed where it fitted the coconut's shell. Mr. Tuttle smelled in the aperture. He selected another and mused over the small round scratch on its eye.

"Oolah," murmured the parson, and then locked both front and back doors.

"KUNNEL, you better hurry down there and do somethin'," pleaded Mr. Gilfish in the dusky seclusion of the Maddox House veranda. "By Swanny!—it'll bust up the Oolahs; it'll bust up the church—it'll make more fuss an' scandal than this town ever saw, if Dick Tuttle peddles them coconuts out to the Baptists, and some ole lady cracks one open f'r pie fillin' an' finds it full o' popskull! Kunnel, you better——"

"The time, seh, calls fo' true men," announced Colonel Tunk adjusting his frock coat lapels with dignified composure. "No subterfuge—nothin' that is not above board in this crisis! I shall merely attend the bazaar and ask Mr. Tuttle to allow me to select a crate o' coconuts fo' my own delectation an' the lodge ritual. He, seh, bein' a gentleman, will gladly cooperate."

"That's it—cooperate—" retorted Mr. Gilfish pessimistically. "He wanted to join the Oolahs, but if Dick Tuttle gits in this lodge the rest of us'll git in jail—that's all I got to say!"

"Come on, seh," said Colonel Tunk. "The Sons of Oolah will be there. I expaict, seh, to enjoy myself, after claimin' in full view and above board, one crate of selected coconuts from my donation. Perfectly open an' casual transaction—it couldn't be better fo' our ends, Mr. Gilfish."

"Well, I hope so— You can't initiate some o' the lodge members on jest milk," put in Mr. Gilfish as he hurried along with Colonel Tunk. Mr. Gilfish thoughtfully neglected to tell the colonel that he had already made one covert effort to save the Sons of Oolah from this calamity.

Townsfolk were beginning to arrive and pay their twenty-five cents apiece to enter the Oriental Bazaar when Colonel Tunk entered and bowed with the air of a gentleman of the old school to the effusive ladies of the reception committee. Gay was the scene within.

Lanterns, rugs, plants and hangings from the homes of Mississippi City lent an air of Oriental abandon; and in one corner stood the striped tent of the Bashi-bazouks with the warlike relics of dead and gone sheiks of the desert tacked on the poles. And round about the Millard cabbage-palms ran the sandy Sahara itself as much as fifteen feet either way. Colonel Tunk and Mr. Gilfish gazed and gazed. They knew it was a constitutional desert, for on a Turkish divan in the caravansary stood a bottle of pop.

"Is this here the oasis where the preacher said a fello' pilgrim could rest an' refresh himself after trottin' the burnin' sands?" murmured Mr. Gilfish. "And looky!—what they did with those blamed coconuts! The beans is spilled, kunnel—upside down an' backward!"

Colonel Tunk paled slightly and then looked at Dick Tuttle's perverted handiwork with superb nonchalance.

Along each rail of the enclosure about the booth of the Bashi-bazouks ran a row of little brown coconuts. Around the dais under the striped tent were worked other designs in coconuts. The back wall held Arabesques of them; strings of them suspended by their hairy whiskers ran up and down the pillars; while on the counter before the booth, the remainder were heaped with a placard announcing that the lot was a donation to the missionary fund from Colonel T. Sambola Tunk, Esq.

"I didn't think," murmured Colonel Tunk," that he'd do that! Sixty of 'em somewhere in all that mess—marked with the sign of the Oolah."

"I told you to keep the preacher out o' this coconut business," croaked Mr. Gilfish evilly in the Colonel's ear. "Close to eight gallons o' whisky decoratin' this church entertainment—I guess we better fade right out o' here before they start something!"

"Hum," retorted Colonel Tunk. "There's Judge Brandagee and Major Huckaby just arrivin'. Mr. Gilfish, seh, I am goin' to have my coconuts if I have to tear down this whole, unholy infidel exhibition!"

"Lordy, no!" whispered Mr. Gilfish, "Dick Tuttle's askin' 'em to sing! Finesse—hey? Go to it, ole hoss!" And across the hot sands vanished Mr. Gilfish to lose himself in the crowds around the bazaar booths.

"Hello, kunnel! What do you think of it?"

Colonel Tunk turned to gaze into the red, perspiring face of Parson Dick Tuttle. Dick waved a hand at the tent of the faithful.

"Wonderful," murmured Colonel Tunk. "Remarkable—but, seh——"

"You were late getting here," went on Preacher Dick, "but there's the pile. Get a basket, kunnel, and help yourself. You'll find a drink in the booth——"

"Seh?"

"Grape juice, kunnel. Or maybe you like coconut milk——"

Colonel Tunk smiled.

"To a true believer, seh, seekin' the shade o' the oasis, after the desert sands, your invitation is alluring. Don't mind seh, if I do!"

Preacher Dick waved a hospitable hand as some fussy old lady came up and sought his advice. Then grandly, conscious that behind one of the cabbage palms, Mr. Gilfish was watching timorously, and that the other Sons of Oolah in the throngs were waiting to see how a Tunk would master fate, the colonel strolled into the desert wastes.

He was looking over the Reverend Mr. Tuttle's collection of Oriental antiques with the air of one casually interested when he felt a tug on his sleeve.

"Kunnel," whispered Mr. Gilfish, "it's all right, hey? We better make a quick move now, while folks are listenin' to the preacher explain about the heathen. Come on, now, kunnel, f'r a real ole nut-pickin' while there's a chance. Hey—right by your hand on the rail, there!—I'm a son of a Oolah if there ain't one with our mark on it first thing!"

COLONEL TUNK eyed it casually. "Yes, seh—and there's another beside it. Easy, now, Mr. Gilfish. Calm yourself, seh—here's two more on the rail——"

He heard a sudden gasp from Mr. Gilfish who was looking covertly at the coconut pyramid on the booth counter.

"Here's a bunch of 'em—all turned with an eye up—an' every durn coconut marked with an O, kunnel!"

The colonel gazed upon them. It seemed to him suddenly that not only the eyes of every coconut in Reverend Dick Tuttle's oasis but also the eyes of every person in the First Baptist church, including Sheriff Zeb Peters, were turned upon him.

He was aware that Judge Brandagee and Major Huckaby were watching him darkly. Mr. Pink Garford peered from behind one of the Millard cabbage palms. Senator Yancey was paying three prices for a hand-painted picture frame at old Mrs. Mahaffy's Art counter, but he kept one eye intent on what Colonel Tunk, High Potentate of the Order of the Sons of Oolah, was doing. Even Reverend Mr. Tuttle, as he nobly championed the heathens' cause, gave Colonel Tunk a covert glance.

The colonel felt Mr. Gilfish again clutch his sleeve.

"Every nut in the lot has got an O upside down an' backward, "whispered Mr. Gilfish. "How'n Tophet is a fello' goin' to pick 'em?"

"How," inquired Colonel Tunk slowly, "did this infamy happen?"

"Mebbe Bat Murphy loaded 'em all with hooch?" commented Mr. Gilfish. "Lordy, there's Sheriff Zeb wanderin' this way, kunnel!"

Colonel Tunk turned with perfect nonchalance to Zeb Peters.

"Evenin', seh."

"Oh—evenin'!" responded Mr. Peters. "You gents thinkin' of buyin' pie-fillin' for to aid an' assist the pore benighted heathen?"

"Probably, seh!"

Colonel Tunk strolled on. A moment later he and Judge Brandagee and Major Huckaby conferred casually while each was held up and trimmed by a sweet young thing at the fancy work booth. Then they heard the persuasive voice of that stalwart young worker for the heathen, Reverend Dick Tuttle. He was calling one and all to hear a pæan in praise of coconuts.

Health, wealth and honors, declared Mr. Tuttle, would follow the use of coconut milk. He cited Scripture and economics, Oriental lore and therapeutics to show that coconut milk would make glad the heart of youth and rejuvenate the old. Especially, argued Mr. Tuttle, would the milk of the coconut do worlds of good to any one present who ever backslid in his religion or had poisoned his system with white mule whisky, as he was pained to think might be the case with some he could mention but wouldn't.

To buy coconuts, went on Preacher Dick jubilantly, not only would benefit the heathens' welfare but would put first-class pie-fillin' in every home of Mississippi City, and he was there to auction them off.

"Auction?' gasped Major Huckaby. "What the dev——"

"He doesn't mean it!" murmured Judge Brandagee—"Kunnel, stop this!"

"There's old lady Mahaffy of the W. C. T. U. buyin' one," gasped Gilfish.

"Marked with our little jigger sign!" whispered Mr. Pink Garford.

Colonel Tunk turned a steady eye upon his pilgrim band.

"Gentlemen——"

He heard a slow voice over his shoulder.

"Pie comes high," drawled Sheriff Peters, "but we got to have it."

Colonel Tunk was striding for the hot sands. Mr. Gilfish slid along by his coat-tails like a scared rabbit. Behind came the other Sons of Oolah and they heard the first dimes and quarters of the coconut sale dropping into the box by Preacher Dick's hand.

“Fo’ bits, seh!” thundered Colonel Tunk. “Six dollehs fo’ the dozen!”

Mr. Tuttle paused with a coconut in his hand. He looked down in amazed innocence.

“Why, kunnel—don’t be a piker! Start ’em right—start ’em right!”

“Seventy-five cents apiece f’r ten coconuts,” drawled Sheriff Zeb, pulling his mustaches.

“Ten dollars for a dozen,” roared Major Huckaby, and reached a bill to the preacher’s hand.” Hey, Dick—make it a couple o’ dozen!”

“Why, Major—” gasped Mr. Tuttle. “You here? And Senator Yancey? Why, I haven’t seen you and Pink Garford in church for a coon’s age! Ten dol——”

“Fifteen—” said Sheriff Zeb, sepulchrally, and the Sons of Oolah looked at him, and then broke into a chorus. There was a clamor outside of the body-guard which the Oolah had managed to form around the coconut pyramid. Laughter and astonished whoops came from the throngs. Parson Tuttle stood pointing a long, steady finger over the heads of the pilgrims and proceeded to sell coconuts. If one puzzled member of the First Baptist congregation started to open his mouth Major Huckaby bawled forth a bid that put him out of the running.

Did Sheriff Zeb Peters merely rub his chin and look meaningly at Parson Dick, Mr. Pink Garford yelped loudly a dollar raise on whatever coconuts were bringing.

“Eighteen dollars a dozen—” cried young Mr. Tuttle. “Step up, gentlemen! Get closer—drop your money in the missionary box, right to my left, senator! Thanks, kunnel, for the twenty—you’ll only get ten nuts for it, the way this market is whoopin’! Hey, Mr. Gilfish, did I hear you speakin’?”

“I—I—guess I’ll go home,” quavered Mr. Gilfish.

“An’ bring back your gunny-sack,” drawled the sheriff. “Pie-fillin’, Mr. Gilfish——”

“Come on, now!” shouted Parson Tuttle joyously. “Just one dozen left—standin’ on the hand-rail enclosing this little dusty desert! What’s that, Mr. Peters—thirty dollars a doz——”

Colonel Tunk was shaking an empty bill case by Mr. Gilfish’s ear. Mr. Gilfish was backing away, but Judge Brandagee’s rotund form stopped him.

* * *

“THIS here candidate for the lodge,” whispered Pink Garford, “kunnel, he ain’t helped us a bit—and I paid a hundred and ten dollars for mine!”

“Home—” moaned Mr. Gilfish.

“Pie-fillin’,” suggested Sheriff Peters over his shoulder.

“Thirty-two-and-a-ha-a-f!” sang Dick Tuttle waving a sample, and the sign of the Oolah stared down on Mr. Gilfish. “You get ’em, sheriff—”

Colonel Tunk twisted a firm hand into Mr. Gilfish’s collar. Mr. Gilfish felt Major Huckaby kick his shins. Mr. Pink Garford jammed an elbow into his ribs.

“Thu——thirty——f-f-ive,” gasped Mr. Gilfish.

“Done!” cried Mr. Tuttle. “Hello, another dozen left? I lump ’em to you, Mr. Gilfish, at the same figure. You’re lucky to pick ’em up, Mr. Gilfish!”

“Pie-fillin’,” repeated Sheriff Zeb. “And ain’t it a shame, Mr. Tuttle? These six gentlemen hornin’ in ahead o’ me on every bid, and I couldn’t buy a durn coconut! What’s home goin’ to be without some coconut pie?”

He leaned over the counter while Mr. Tuttle was checking up receipts. The little crowd of astounded church folks was scattering, some on their homeward way. A little apart gathered the six Sons of Oolah. Mr. Pink Garford mopped his brow. “Keep your eye on ’em, senator. Judge Brandagee has gone to get his tourin’ car. Major, borry those two big hampers from the wimmen.”

“Where’s Mr. Gilfish?” demanded Senator Yancey. “Say, he got his and beat it, kunnel! Must be goin’ to get all set for the initiation!”

“Seh, will you help me tote these coconuts to my rig?” said Colonel Tunk. “A load of seven dozen coconuts——”

“Le’ me give you a hand, kunnel—” Sheriff Peters was wandering by. “And say—Dick Tuttle says this coconut sale brought seven hundred and eighty-six dollars for the heathen. Average about one dollar a nut——”

“Evenin’, seh—evenin’!” murmured Colonel Tunk. And with a bow he strode after the other Sons of Oolah who seemed to have business suddenly out the front door. The sheriff watched them loading coconuts into two motor cars and Colonel Tunk’s plantation buckboard, and then over the hot sands but through the chilly night the pilgrims departed.

"It ain't fair," soliloquized Mr. Peters. "I couldn't buy a single coconut to take home to my pore young ones!"

Four blocks away as the Sons of Oolah were passing the Maddox House, a solitary figure hurried out and motioned to them. Mr. Gilfish leaned over the Brandagee car.

"Say—" he quavered, "I went around behind the church an' plugged 'em. Three was sour, and twenty-one of 'em had milk—jest milk! Hey, kunnel, did you get yours?"

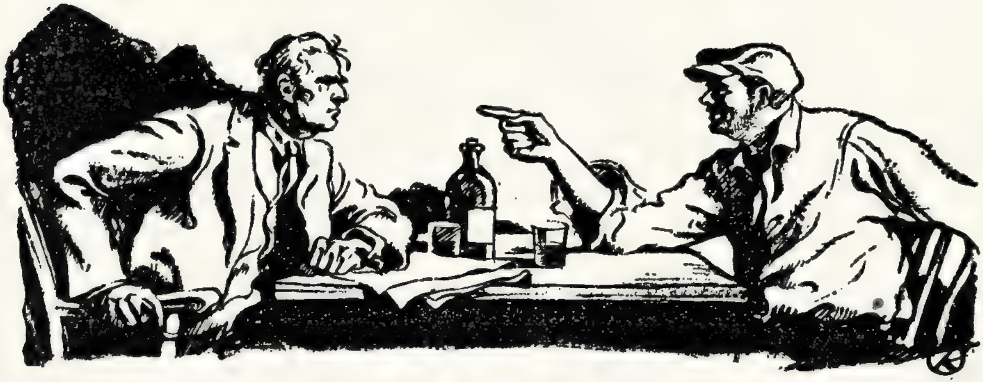
"I did, seh. But—milk? Do I understand you to say—coconut milk?"

"Yes, seh! Milk—that's what every durned Son of Oolah in this crowd has bought, too! Right back of the church lot is a pile of busted coconuts that smells like a hill-billy still after Zeb Peters has raided it.

"Zeb and Dick Tuttle busted every one of your loaded nuts, kunnel, and then they marked all the others and peddled 'em to us at a bigger price than I'd pay f'r a durned coconut if I was in the middle of the Sahara desert and only one nut in sight!"

The Sons of Oolah looked at Mr. Gilfish in silence. Then Mr. Pink Garford remarked that it was a grand night for stars but most of them seemed to be in the Milky Way. Major Huckaby added that he thought the dry spell would continue. Senator Yancey opined that the coconut market was upside down and backward. Judge Brandagee said he was willing to sell short—preferably to the Heathen if he knew his address.

"Pie-fillin'," murmured Colonel T. Sambola Tunk. "Seh, we cain't run the first lodge of Oolah on pie-fillin'! Evenin', gentlemen. Giddap—you, hoss! We'll take a little trot home over the hot sands."



THE GOLD CURE

By W. C. Robertson and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

BOOZY BILL stirred in his sodden sleep. His red eyelids quivered, his nostrils twitched. After a long, silent stretch, he turned over on his stomach, opened his puffy eyes and carefully parted the tall grasses that screened the river bank.

The voices that had disturbed his dream of an ocean of whisky were real voices; they continued now, low and softened by the purr of the slow river. The smell that had tingled in his sleepy nostrils was the scent of a Turkish cigaret.

With furtive, eager caution Boozy Bill peered between the stems of the tall grass. He could look right down the steep sandy bank upon the lazy water of the Guayappe. A group of brown native women were washing gold from the edge of a bar, chattering continuously as they worked. On a rock half-wet by the ripples sat a short, slender man, dressed like a dandy, watching the women. His well-fitting whipcords bulged slightly over the hip pocket. On that bulge Boozy's eyes fixed themselves. Little thrills ran all along his spine, and his mouth began to water.

The big tramp pulled himself together and scrambled down the bank. Startled, the man on the rock whirled to face him.

"Hello, Fox!" Boozy's greeting was blithely hopeful. "Got a flask on ye?"

The little man's frown erased itself. A smile spread over his face. He looked like a well-groomed angel. Any one who had seen that smile would have taken him for an innocent boy who had never known the guile of a heartless world.

"A flask? Certainly!" His hand shot to his hip, removing the cause of the bulge. "Help yourself to the finest whisky you've tasted in years. Can't get its like in the States these days. I guess that's the reason you left, eh?"

"Nope!" gurgled the tramp, from under the inverted bottle. "Uncle Sam didn't like my curves." He paused to let the fiery liquor gurgle down his throat. "Safe here. No extradition in Honduras. Glug-glug!"

The other reached swiftly for the flask, but Boozy held it to one side and glared fiercely.

"Lord, man, don't take it away! I hardly wet my neck yet!" He raised it for another swig; but his companion snatched it away deftly, and disgustedly surveyed the lowered tide.

Hopeless of another drink, the tramp yearned for conversation.

"What brings ye to Honduras, Kelly?" he asked.

Fox Kelly pointed to the working women.

"Same thing," he grunted. "Heard of some good placers down here, and found this bar. I thought of promoting it, but the results are too thin. Natives talked it up so big I looked for a rich haul. Honduras was always good ground before. You don't know of anything, do you?"

He beamed sweetly on the disheveled tramp. Boozy Bill Blain was an odd fish to find favor with one so prosperous. His great, moon-like face was almost lost in a shock of tousled red hair, and pin-feather whiskers grew to his eyes. The dominant feature of an ill-conditioned lot was a mountainous red nose, large and lumpy, that shone like a beacon on a dark night. Slick and glossy, it had cost him a lifetime of joyous carousing, and much money.

He fondled it with the bowl of an old briar pipe, then gazed at the pipe as if to calculate, from its oily sheen, the condition of his prideful proboscis.

"Ain't much in your line," he answered thoughtfully.

Kelly showed his disappointment. The angelic face that was his fortune clouded. He had hoped that Boozy might pay for his whisky with useful information on local mines in need of dexterous promotion. It was Boozy's business to prospect for gold, and Kelly's to promote. Neither one had been a scrupulous practitioner.

Boozy's skill in "salting" mines was the offense which had forced him to seek refuge, three years before, in the Central American republic; Kelly, whose financial operations always filled his own pockets and emptied other men's, was just returned from the States to make another killing. On his previous visit, he had profited so well that Honduras called him irresistibly back.

But his trade was the exploiting of mineral deposits that others found; he couldn't so easily find them for himself. Boozy could. Originally a Cœur d'Alene hard rock man, the tramp had become a desert rat with an exigent thirst, a profound knowledge of Honduras mines, and an easy conscience.

"Think again!" Kelly urged. "All I want is a mine and a sucker!"

"Gimme that flask, then. I can't think with a dry neck!"

Ruefully Kelly relinquished his property. One tilt, and the flask was empty.

Boozy sighed deeply.

"Got an idea," he murmured. "It's good, too; but it needs oilin'. Any more whisky?"

The promoter fixed him with a savage glare.

"You get another drink when you spring the idea, see? It's got to be mighty good, though. Something like the haul I made out of old Doc McWhinnie two years ago."

"Yeah!" Boozy laughed sarcastically. "The trimmin' you handed old Doc is just what dishes you now. The natives in this district love the old coot like a father. Whenever they're sick he doses 'em up, an' he's saved a dozen lives in every village. The whole of Olancho is sore at the raw one you handed Doc. Some of 'em have mines, but they won't sell to you. You're blacklisted."

"Oh, I'll set 'em up, blast you!" Fox surrendered. "Come on up to the tent and get your drink, if it'll start the think-tank working. Things have broken badly for me. I counted on that Guayappe placer—was going to start a big company and sell shares—but it fizzled.

"I've got just about enough to finance one real deal, but I can't take chances. If I don't find the right thing, I've got to go back to the States. —Hi, you women!" he shouted in atrocious Spanish. "Keep what gold you have washed, and come to the tent in the morning for your pay. —This way, Boozy!"

KELLY'S tent was set on the top of a bluff overlooking the river, in the cool shade of a large *ceiba-tree*. It was a fine tent, of khaki-colored silk, with a big fly extension, under which stood a portable table and a pair of camp-chairs. The promoter liked to do himself well.

The interior was comfortably furnished and eloquent of money. Confidence was the foundation on which Kelly had built his success as a swindler; and in building up confidence he found show and style as valuable assets as his angelic face.

Under the fly sat Kelly and Boozy, breathing in the cool breeze that sprang up with sunset. The western sky was like burnished copper. Below them the river sang quietly to itself.

Between the two scalawags stood a small table, and on the table a bottle of *Black and White*, its glory almost departed. Kelly's eyes rested anxiously on the satisfied tramp, who reached out to complete the bottle's discomfiture.

"Well?" snapped the promoter.

Boozy set down the empty bottle with a sigh.

"There's just one mine," he said slowly, "just one, that you might be able to pick up. Since you skinned Doc McWhinnie, the only man left in Olancho that would deal with you is—Doc himself! An' Doc's got—a—real—mine!"

Kelly scowled.

"Have you drunk my good liquor to run a bloomer on me, you bum? That cock won't fight! Doc won't deal with me again. Give us something better, or I'll run you out!"

"Doc may sell." Boozy's voice was calm, even dreamy. "Nobody else will. He wants to get rid of that mine anyway. It's a liability!"

"A liability! And you want me to buy it! Say, you've got a fine notion of a joke!"

Tilting back his chair, Boozy embarked suddenly on a sea of sleepy reminiscence. As he ran on, yawning between sentences, Fox began to lick his lips greedily.

"Doc took that mine in payment of a bad debt. Old King, of Galeras, died with no assets but the mine. He never did get more than an ounce to the ton out of it. Doc hasn't worked it at all—wouldn't pay without more capital than he can raise. It's not been touched since King died.

"Ho-hum! Well, there's an old tale—the natives say old King had a mighty rich vein, an' that the miner he hired to work it had a grudge agin' him. A bit of a stringer came in, runnin' a bit over an ounce an' a half. The miner give the tunnel a twist that run the real gold-bearer into the hangin' wall. Then he just worked the stringer, which didn't yield enough to put through the *araster*. His idea was that King 'ud quit the mine in disgust. Then the miner planned to denounce it later, an' work the rich hidden vein for himself. But the rock caved in on him an' killed him. King never knew about the vein.

"It's maybe just a yarn, an' maybe more. But if you want a speculation—" Boozy's voice trailed off in a snore.

Kelly prodded him awake.

"Look here! That tale—if I could get the mine cheap, I might take a chance. I could float stock on the strength of the yarn. But I can't buy it myself. The Doc would soak a fierce price on me. Now if you'd go to him—"

"Fat chance!" wheezed the tramp.

"I'm not a-goin' to have no dealin's with that dirty, sneakin' Scotch pill-shooter!"

Kelly stared.

"What you got against McWhinnie? I heard you and he were chummy!"

"Was, but ain't. The danged old pilgrim squirted a lot o' muck into me when I was sick. The stuff spoiled my thirst for half a year. What kind o' trick is that to play on a feller? Dang his hide, I'd admire to stick a knife into him!"

His eyes closed again; but they opened wide, and he sat up, at Kelly's next words:

"There's another bottle under the cot. Wake up, and talk business!"

Boozy's thirst revealed undreamed-of possibilities, and he scowled sympathetically as Kelly cursed the doctor.

"He bawled me out over that other deal we had, and it was straight as a string. I'd give a lot to sting him again in the same place. What about this mine? D'you believe that about the lost vein?"

"Hain't seen it. But if the tale's true, you'd be a millionaire. Doc will sell—even to you. He's hard up, an' the mine ain't yieldin' him nothin'. I've heard things—Oh, I guess the gold's there."

"Where is the mine?" Kelly was leaning forward, quivering with excited greed.

"None o' yer business!"

"Aw, look here, Boozy! I'll be square with you! I'll pay you fifty now, and fifty more if I find the true vein!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" Boozy's laughter almost upset the table. "A hundred bucks, an' I offers you a real clean-up! Gimme a drink!"

"Well, if that don't suit you, what do you want? I'm reasonable, old man. Name your price. I can't do more than say no, can I?" He poured liquor with noisy effectiveness. "Have another drink?"

"You go to blazes!" shouted Boozy; but he drank the whisky. "You'll give me five hundred now, an' five hundred more when ye find the real vein, or I'll blow the gaff to Doc. I ain't makin' you rich out o' brotherly love. Ye might offer me fifty for a ordinary tip, if I didn't know yer game. But I'm givin' yer tip, game, an' all; an' I know too much to sell cheap. Put up or shut up!"

He was sitting straight up now. His fiery whiskers bristled, and his face wore so truculent an air that Kelly's backward lunge almost resulted in a fall. He had never known the rum-shot old tramp to be so fierce; therefore he assumed Boozy must have a good thing, to fight so hard for a big rake-off.

"Five hundred!" Kelly wailed. "I haven't got that much with me!"

"Dirty liar!" Boozy snarled. A swift move of his right hand drew the promoter's eyes to a menacing little round hole, black and deadly, hugged close to the tramp's hip. Kelly's hands went up.

"Just bring out that cash box I see on yer cot. Don't try any shenanigans. Open it! That's right. Wow! Didn't I say ye was a liar? Now hand over a thousand—quick! Good! Now ye'll hand me another thou' when ye see the gold. Yes or no? That's the talk!"

"Take that gun away! You've got your money. You'll give it back if I don't like the looks of the mine?"

"Sure!" Boozy folded the bills slowly, stuffed them in his one sound pocket, and tossed his weapon on the table in front of Kelly. It was an empty pint bottle.

Kelly swore; but his scowl faded as the tramp gave him the last particulars of the old King mine. He had not seen the gold-bearing vein himself; but a half-witted native who had assisted in its walling-up swore it was there, and hadn't sense enough to lie. Kelly could get the native to go with him and show him all over the mine. If he found the gold, all right; if not, he need not buy, and Boozy would return the advance thousand. The native *mozo* wasn't really foolish—just simple. He knew more about the vein than any one else, and wouldn't blab.

"Bring him round here tomorrow!" Kelly urged.

"Nothin' doin'. You're goin' to give me five quarts more o' booze, an' I'm goin' off on a three-day spree. When I'm sober, I'll bring the native. Then you an' him can look over the mine, an' talk with Doc. I'm goin' to sleep!"

DOCTOR ANGUS McWHINNIE was in his den, lovingly composing his mornin's mornin' behind the door. During all his years in Honduras he had poured this libation at the shrine of Bacchus. He was not a toper. There was not enough liquor in the republic for that.

This was a rite—not a habit, nor an appetizer. He alone knew, and he jealousy guarded, the secret of that peg. Its success was attested by the many reunions held in his den in the early mornings.

He was just pouring the last item, and glorying in his work, when a frowsy face peered in at the door.

"Hey, Doc!" cried a thick voice. "Where are ye hidin'?"

"I'm here, in body an' speerit, an' gettin' rready tae pit speerits in the body. I'll hae to mix anither noo." The doctor's rugged features jutted out from behind the door. He grinned amiably.

"Hello, Boozy! What ill wind blaws ye in sae earrly?"

Boozy Bill carefully shut the door behind him. "Ye'll think it's a good wind afore I'm through, Doc. Kin I set down?"

"Can ye sit doon? When did I ever deny ye hospitality? Here, ye red-nosed skate, hae a drink!" He cast a solemn look at the bedraggled figure slouching to a chair, reached him the mixed peg, and prepared himself another.

Bill downed it at a gulp.

"Say, that's the stuff!" he gasped, rubbing his paunch. "Say, Doc, what's the treatment for a cuss as skins ye?"

"Pleasure before business, Bill! Hae anither, an' here's tae ye!" The doctor's laughing green eyes met the faded blue ones of his visitor.

"Lookin' at ye!" Boozy replied, and raised the rose-tinted glass.

It is to be feared that the tramp had sadly deceived the astute Mr. Kelly. His behavior toward the doctor was anything but the hostility he had declared the night before. Nor—though he was now on a fair way toward it—had he indulged in his three-day spree.

"Grreat stuff, that!" McWhinnie purred. "A life-saver, airly i' the morrnin'. Ye should never prropound abstract questions till ye're forrtified. Noo, what were ye askin'?"

"What would ye do, Doc, to a man as skinned ye?"

"It wad depend on hoo muckle skin I had lost," the Scot answered judicially.

Boozy surveyed the bottom of his glass.

"Fox Kelly's back," he announced innocently.

McWhinnie sat bolt upright. "Well?" he snapped.

"They say he's lookin' fer another sucker to sell him a mine. He's always made a killin' in Honduras." The hint was accompanied by a sly look at the doctor.

He got the expected rise. The Scot's language filled the room with the sudden smell of brimstone. On an earlier visit, Kelly had bought a mine from McWhinnie by the old trick of putting up the capital and working the mine, getting fifty-one per cent. for his investment. All the doctor would have to do was to sit back and reap the harvest. But the harvest had been Kelly's, and the graft easy.

The fine old man had taken Kelly at his face value, never realizing that the face was a fallen angel's. The lesson had been strong medicine, but McWhinnie had taken his dose like a man. Now Kelly was back, on the Guayappe, within a short distance of the doctor's dwelling—and hunting a mine to buy.

The blood of fighting clansmen boiled in the Scot's veins. Hot of heart and cool of head, his first thought was of revenge. He had a mine now, one that he would gladly sell. He owed Kelly a long score; perhaps Providence would be kind and let him settle it. But he knew now, from bitter experience, that Kelly was no easy man to beat.

Boozy's pale eyes read the doctor as they would have read the label on a bottle. The psychology was ripe. He played the vibrant string.

"Maybe ye'd like another whirl at that geezer, Doc? There's the old mine ye got from King. If ye could get Kelly to pay ye a good price fer it——"

"He'd no do it. The mine's no guid. Kelly's naebody's fool. If I sell for what it's worrth, I'd no get my revenge; an' Kelly knows better than tae pay me more."

Boozy winked wickedly.

"Me an' you might tinker the mine up a bit," he suggested. "It can be done, with a little—science."

The dialect dropped from McWhinnie's tongue. He was touched on his honor.

"None of that, Boozy! I've never stooped to cheat any man, and I'm too old to begin. I'd like well enough to see the rascal skinned to the bone—he deserves it—but my conscience will not let me connive at an illegal and unjust trick."

"He swindled you," Boozy grumbled. "It'd only be turn about an' fair play to swindle him."

"And no man better fitted for the part than you. If there's a single trick you're not up to, it's yet to be learned. I hear it was salting mines that got you chased out of the States. But I'll have no such doings with my mine.

"If there's any way to persuade Kelly to pay me more than my mine is worth, then all right, so long as everything is above board. If you've a scheme that will do that, let's hear it. But I'll have no dirty work!"

"Not a scheme in the old bean! My throat——"

"I thocht so!" The burr returned with a grim good humor. "Ye like naethin' sae weel as tae get me worrked up, an' then ye maun wet ye'er thrapple. I'll fix up anither life-saver. If it's gey strang, it'll mayhap steemulate yer brain."

"Ye're shoutin'! Gimme two more, an' I'll fix Kelly so he'll go home in his shirt!"

"Here ye are! Fix him all ye wish, but honestly, mind! I'll hae nane o' yer evil tricks. Ye're a talented rascal, but ye munna swindle the man. If he wad only swindle himsel', I'd dee happy."

McWhinnie paced up and down the room with gathering anger.

"Ye'll be rememberin', Boozy, that the mine Mr. Kelly was eenstrumental in robbin' me of, was no' my ain, but the prroperrty o' a lassie wha had gi'en me her power of attorrney tae run it for her. —— him—parrdon me for swearin'—he pit me in a vera bad poseetion wi' the lass, an' hurrt her eenterests, an' I'd no' be sorry tae see him bitten himsel'. Man alive, I wish he wad buy the King mine, an' eenable me tae pay the lassie back what she lost!

"Juist ye tak' a look at the mine, Bill, an' tell me what ye think it's worrth. I'll mak' a strang appeal tae Kelly's better feelin's. Mayhap the Lord'll wark on his conscience. But—dinna ye be saltin' it! I'll favor no sic doin's!"

"Never fear, Doc. I'll give it the once-over. Bet I can find somethin' pretty good there!"

"Mayhap. Ye're a guid lad, Bill, if ye didna drink mair than's guid for ye. I'm in the mind tae gie ye a coorse o' Chlorid o' Gold. Ye ken the stuff. It'll cure any auld toper o' his drought. Ye need it bad. I'll pit the bottle on this shelf tae remind me, an' some day I'll fix ye up wi' it."

"Not me, Doc! Dang it, man! I wouldn't lose this thirst for all the money in your old tobacco box. Put it on the shelf all ye like, but ye'll never put it in me!"

"Maybe no! But it's there, in case ye change yer mind. I'll gang noo an' get my hat. I'm gaun doon tae the brook tae get a bit o' *sphagnum*. I'm makin' a bit rockery, an' I ken juist whaur tae get the richt kin' o' moss tae stick in in a hurry. Ye'll gang wi' me?"

"Sure! Get yer hat. I'll be ready!"

The doctor left the room. As he shut the door, Boozy cast one glance to the shelf where stood a vial of Chlorid of Gold, in suspiciously close proximity to a hypodermic syringe. He grinned, winked, and murmured:

"The Gold Cure, fer old Boozy Bill! Not in a month o' hot Sundays!"

McWhinnie came back, rigged for his job; and the two went down through the little strip of jungle to the *quebrada* that supplied the house with water.

There, by the cool stream, the doctor patiently explained the nature of the mosses there, some of which, he said, would not bear transplanting; while others would take root at once and continue growing. These last were what he wanted for his rockery. They would give all the appearance of having been there from the first. He disliked the band-box appearance of an obviously new garden.

Boozy at last bade him good-by, and started up the road leading to the valley. As by an afterthought, the Scot called to him.

"Oh, Bill! Ye'll maybe remember the tale aboot the mine, aboot the rich vein that the natives say King's miner coverred up? There micht be something in it. If Kelly should find it, noo—"

Boozy grinned to himself.

"Maybe ye're right, Doc. Ye're no miner, an' it might be better than ye think. If ye had the guts, now, it might be fixed—"

"Na, na! No dirrty wark! Ye're ay thinkin' o' yer sinfu' ways! On yer road, ye ruffian!"

Boozy turned away, chuckling. He loved the choleric, upright doctor, whose benefactions to him had not been limited to lavish drinks. McWhinnie had helped him out of tight holes, and pulled him out of a tropic fever complicated with alcohol. He would return the favor if he could.

But the Gold Cure! The very thought made Boozy thirsty.

TEN hours later the doctor sat in his den, smiling over "Holy Willie's Prayer," when a wild-eyed Boozy flung the door open and burst in with a yell.

"Bill! Hae a drink!" the doctor offered automatically. But Boozy's answer astonished him:

"Drink me eye! Doc, I'm sick! I been seein' things all day! Pink crocodiles! Fer God's sake gimme that Chlorid o' Gold!"

Instantly the doctor recovered his poise. With a thin smile, he strode over to the shelf, and reached for the vial.

"No, no! Gimme it! I'm goin' to take it meself. I know how! Quick! I'm feelin' bad!"

McWhinnie handed him vial and hypodermic, expecting the sot to roll up his sleeve and inject the Cure. But Boozy with a screech, grabbed both vial and syringe and ran out into the night. The doctor stared after him, shaking his head.

"The puir deil! He's gane daft wi' deleerium treemens!"

FOX KELLY knew better than to take another man's word. Early on the fourth morning after his talk with Boozy, he sat at the mouth of the old King mine, gleefully watching a chunky native clear away the accumulation of boulders which had slid down and completely closed the tunnel.

He was very glad all that rock was there. It was a nuisance to wait till it was removed; but its presence proved that no one had entered the mine in years. If Kelly could have walked straight into the tunnel, he would have suspected anything he might find there. He had been gulled into buying "salted" mines before, whose real worthlessness had been concealed by clever dosing with gold brought from richer deposits.

But this mine could not have been tampered with. If Boozy, or McWhinnie, had taken the trouble to remove the rocks, "salt" the vein, and replace them again, the débris would have looked fresh. Fresh it decidedly was not. Everywhere were signs—proofs—of long abandonment.

The stones, piled up in confusion, were half-buried in sand, and covered with spider-webs. It was quite plain that generations of spiders had labored here, undisturbed by human approach, to spin those hundreds of dirty gossamers that plastered the rocks and lurked in every cranny.

Natividad Flores, the half-wit *mozo* introduced by Boozy, said that this slide had filled the mouth the year that work on the mine had stopped. Kelly knew better than to doubt it. Even the cleverest expert may be deceived by a cunningly salted mine; but no "salter" that ever lived could spin webs. Now, if only the vein was there — It would be a killing, and McWhinnie would be skinned so close he would forget his earlier trimming.

A low whirring sounded behind the rocks. Natividad was working fast, and they would soon be through. Kelly started at the noise, strode to the pile, pulled a rock from the top, and looked in. Almost instantly he fell back, forced away by a rush of bats through the hole.

"Gosh! They're anxious to get out!" he muttered. "They've been in there so long they're hungry enough to face daylight. That's proof enough no one has been here lately. I'll find it just as King's man left it."

He could wait no longer. Gripped by the gold-lust, he drove Natividad to clear away just enough more of the rubbish to let them crawl in over the top. That was better, anyway; when he left, Natividad could close the hole again, and McWhinnie would never suspect their visit.

Lighting candles, they crawled into the dark, damp tunnel. The faint light showed a mass of old, moldy timbers, partly rotted, and in places falling at a touch.

Kelly's caution was still alive, in spite of greed. He spoke Spanish, though very badly. Cunningly he questioned the half-wit; but Flores seemed too dull to understand.

"Where is the place they filled up?" he asked.

"*Si, señor;* they filled it."

"Yes, yes! But where? Where did they fill the hole in the wall?"

"But yes, *señor.*"

"The other tunnel!" Kelly yelled in angry Spanish. "*Otro taladro!* Where did they fill it?"

"*Si, señor*, they filled it!"

"Great Scott!" wailed Kelly. "How in blazes can I make him understand?"

"Better spik Englis, *señor,*" grinned Natividad. "I can spik."

"Damn Boozy! He wouldn't tell me that for a dollar!"

"*Si, señor!* I take ze dollar!"

"Take it, then! Where"—he spoke clearly and slowly— "Where—is—the—vein—they—lost?"

Instantly he was rewarded. Natividad stepped forward to a turn in the tunnel, and put his hand on a second mass of timbers.

"Here, *señor!* Here ze *hombre* lose ze vein. Timber it oop!"

"Good! That's worth a celebration." Kelly drew out his flask, drank, and handed it to Natividad. But straightway he cursed himself, for the half-wit drew off into the darkness and swallowed noisily. Kelly received only the empty flask.

"*Muchissimas gracias, señor!* Goot weesky!"

"You know it!" Kelly groaned. There was no booze nearer than the tent, three miles away.

He took out his disappointment on the native, pushing him remorselessly at the work. The timbers were slimy, rotted, and moss-grown; yet it took much toil to get them out. Then there was old filling to be removed—nasty smelly stuff, too liquid to shovel, too stiff to run. That was a good sign! The only source for that water must be the wall of the real vein—a fissure vein. The tunnel was wet from there to the mouth.

At last Flores leaned on his shovel breathing noisily. The muck was all clear, and the face of the offset was in sight. Kelly ordered the native back into the darkness, where he could not see what might be found, and attacked the rock with his prospecting pick. He knocked loose a chunk from the face, and held his candle close to it.

Wow! It wasn't rock at all! It was jewelry! Gold in little beads, gold in big spangles, gold powdered all over the surface of the ore!

The promoter was crazy with avaricious joy. He broke off another chunk with trembling hands. Richer than the first! A third—every bit as good! No doubt; the vein was a Golconda. He had never dreamed of such richness. There was a million in it!

A glimmer of prudence shone in on his excitement. He glared round to see whether the native had observed his find. All was safe: Natividad sat huddled in the shadow. In the last dim ray of the candle Kelly could make out his closed eyes, the corn-husk cigaret pendulous from his drooping lip.

"Gosh, that was a scare!" Fox muttered. "That big drink was the best thing that could have happened. If he'd seen, and carried word to the Doc——"

Hurriedly he crammed his samples in his saddle-bags; then he kicked the native to his feet, and made Flores hold the candle while he examined the heading at the tunnel's end. This, as he supposed, did not show much free gold, but might on assay. The real vein ran where he had taken his first samples.

"Now we'll go back and hide these chunks," he reflected happily. "I can afford to pay Boozy his second thousand all right. It won't be a flea bite!"

ANGUS McWHINNIE lingered over a late breakfast, relishing the ripe bananas in thick Jersey cream with the zest of an epicure. He raised to his lips a cup of imported Ceylon, and fingered a new biscuit folded over a chocolate core. Suddenly he paused, gazed out the open window, and set his cup down.

"*Hé, mozo!*" he called. "Much ham and eggs!"

The doctor's Scottish hospitality was free to all comers. Conscience forbade him to refuse food and shelter even to an enemy. It was an enemy he had seen approaching now. Fox Kelly was riding down the *filo* toward the house.

The doctor was at the door to greet him. Kelly did not sense the hostility whose only sign was the absence of dialect on his victim's tongue.

"Come in, Kelly. Have a drink?"

Seated in a comfortable fiber armchair, Kelly received his host's preciously compounded peg as if it had been mere whisky, and squared up to attack the ham and eggs which McWhinnie had ordered as a fitting dish for a gross taste. A coffee-colored boy waited on him in deft silence. Breakfast over, the doctor led him to the den.

Kelly's innocent eyes beamed on his host. He smiled his most cherubic smile.

"Wait!" the Scot commanded. "I'm not supposing you came to pass the time of day, Mr. Kelly. You want something. No compliments, please! They don't come well from you. I'm not forgetting that mine you did me out of. It was not an honest deal!"

"Sure it was, doctor! A little close perhaps; but you have to expect that in business."

"To my thinking it was dishonorable."

Kelly flushed painfully.

"Now, doc! You just don't understand. That's the spirit of modern business—do the other man before he can do you. You'd have done me if you could!"

"Not by trickery. I'm old-fashioned. I prefer the other rule—do to your neighbor as you would have him do to you. But you may be right. Perhaps I'm an old fogy. I'm willing to learn."

The promoter's eyes brightened. He had feared McWhinnie would refuse to do business.

"That's the stuff, Doc!" he applauded. "Any business man would tell you so. The game nowadays is to win. When you lose, take your medicine and grin. Your turn'll come. Now take me. I trimmed you once. Now I'm in the market for another mine, and I hear you've got one. I want it. If you can stick me, go ahead." He smiled blandly.

"I will if I can!" the doctor snapped. "You're too slick for me, though. I have the misfortune to be fairly honest."

"So am I, within business limits. I've had experience, and I use it. But you have brains and an education, doctor. You may be able to put one over on me. Come on, skin me if you can! I won't complain."

"What's your proposition?"

"Boozy Bill says you will sell the old King mine. It's not much good, but I'm willing to take a chance. What might you ask for it?" Kelly's tone was admirably careless.

But the Scot had learned his lesson. He could see that Kelly wanted to buy. His own task was to play on the swindler's desire. It was a hard hand to play.

McWhinnie believed the mine to be worthless to a man of Kelly's stamp. Its values ran so low that only a genuine investor, with patience and much capital, would pay good money for it. Kelly must know this. He was not the kind of man to buy in the dark. His wanting the mine at all meant that he held something up his sleeve. Against this unknown something, McWhinnie held no cards but honesty and a passionate craving for revenge. But if only Kelly's hidden card was good enough——

"The King mine won't suit you," the doctor answered. "It's not good enough to swindle old maids and schoolmistresses. You can't swindle on just an ounce to the ton, and there's no more than that."

"Oh, come, Doc! That's not fair. I'm not a shark. You mustn't think I'd take advantage of women because I trimmed a hardened man of the world like you. You're fair game for keen dealing."

"And you?" the Scot shot back at him.

"Me too. I can take care of myself."

"All right! If it's keen dealing you want, I'll deal with you. But watch out for yourself!"

Kelly could not quite conceal the spark of triumph in his eyes. He thought how that mine was good—good beyond the wildest dreams—and to get it at any price was to get a fortune. But it was not his habit to throw money away.

"Now you're talking, Doc! I'm about the only man who would take that rotten mine off your hands, and I'll do it just to make up for the old deal."

McWhinnie laughed in his face.

"That's a good one!" he said. "You a philanthropist! You've given me a different definition of business, and you and I are going to do business on your definition."

"Good! You can't forget, I see. But I'll do the right thing by you this time. Name your own price, and if I can meet it, I'll give you cash on the nail. How's ten thousand?"

"Nothing doing! You want that mine, or you wouldn't be here. If I sell, I've got to get enough to satisfy me for the old deal. Wait!"

The Scot paced up and down the office, his forehead wrinkling. Kelly watched him closely, drawing a long breath of relief when the doctor faced about with an air of resolve. McWhinnie drew pencil and paper from his pocket.

"I'll figure it out. The tunnel's about two hundred yards—say two hundred even. The ore runs about a ton to the yard. Then there's a back of ten yards at the opening, and about thirty over the head. That'll average twenty." He scribbled the figures down.

"Twenty by two hundred will be four thousand. An ounce to the ton. That gold is not fine, and brings only fifteen dollars and some cents at the mint in New Orleans. Fifteen by four thousand makes sixty thousand. Let's see." He corrected his figures, and nodded.

"Very well, Kelly." His keen eyes searched the swindler's guileless face. "This is a prospect rather than a real mine; and a prospect never brings the price of a mine. The ore's not actually in sight, though the blowout is there all the distance. You can pan it out for yourself. I'll offer you the thing, just as it stands, for thirty thousand—cash! She's worth sixty thousand gross, but there's the time and labor. You'll not make much out of it. You don't work mines—you gamble with them. If we deal, I skin you!"

Kelly had followed the old man's figures closely, and found no fault with them. If the mine had been no better than McWhinnie thought, it wasn't worth the price; but Kelly knew it was worth much more.

"If twenty thousand—" he began. The doctor shut him off promptly.

"I said thirty! It's not worth it, but you've just been educating me that a man's justified in getting all he can. The mine brings me in nothing. I'd sell it to another man for less; but if I sell it to you, I'm going to take it out of your hide. Take it or leave it!"

Kelly made a pretense of reflection, but he was inwardly jubilant. The mine was a bonanza; there were millions in it, and the old fool didn't know! He must have it! Thirty thousand was a joke.

"I'll take it, Doc. But you'll have to guarantee that the ore will run the same to the grass roots——"

"I'll guarantee nothing! Hold on—I'll guarantee an ounce to the ton—no more. I'm skinning you, I tell you, and glad of the chance!"

"Good enough! I'll take it on your terms. Here's the money, American notes."

He peeled off the bills and thrust them into the doctor's hands, lest the old man repent his deal.

"Now, Mr. Kelly, I'm not a business man; but I know enough to tell you that we'll have to ride to Juticalpa, the capital of the department, to make the deed. You'll sign an acceptance before the *Juez de Letras de lo Civil*. We'll be on our way. I'll have my man saddle up the beasts, and the cook'll put us up a bit of lunch."

"You're a hard chap, doctor, wanting to get me tied up in a registered bill of sale. You don't trust me yet." Kelly was almost plaintive—but he was smiling.

"I don't; but it's not that. The deed would not be worth the paper it's written on without regular registration. Let's be off!"

EIGHT days later Kelly burst into the doctor's study, flung his hat into a corner, and spluttered a string of oaths.

"Pretty —— smart, aren't you! You're a swindler! You cheated me on that mine!"

"You're wrong, Mr. Kelly." The doctor was all polite irony. "I told you the mine was no good. Swindled you were—by yourself. You can claim credit for a fine job. The young lady whose money you stole on our first deal has her twenty thousand back; I've got the other ten in my pouch as a *solatium* to my wounded feelings. You've got the mine. Everybody's happy, what?"

"Happy! You hypocritical old swindler! You outrageous liar!"

"That will do!" The words came like the crack of a whip. "Not another word! Out of my house!"

Kelly had just time to see the doctor tower over him, apparently twice his normal stature. The next second the promoter felt himself lifted by the collar and flung over the threshold.

"You're a beauty!" McWhinnie railed. "You were the fellow that wouldn't whine at a trimming! You'd take your medicine and grin! Don't like a dose of your own brewing, eh? Faugh!"

Kelly dusted himself off, with a grimace that tried to counterfeit good will.

"I'll admit you skinned me handsomely, Doc. Give me back my money! You've left me flat!"

"A good job, then. Give you back your money? Me? A Scotchman? Do you know anything?"

Kelly's hat, battered and dented, sailed out to him. The door slammed in his face. But just as it shut, McWhinnie heard his enemy wail:

"Say, Doc! At least tell me how you doped that mine! That's what gets my——"

"I'M A guileless child o' Nature, Boozy; but I've been thinkin'. I hae a notion something's wrang wi' that Kelly deal."

As the doctor paused, Boozy Bill drained his glass, and held it to the light suggestively. But his friend did not take the hint. He stared keenly at the tramp; then—

"What did ye do tae that mine?"

Boozy chuckled.

"Gimme another drink, or my tongue won't work. Thanks. Do to the mine? I just gave it the Gold Cure."

"The—what?" For a moment the doctor did not understand; then he saw light.

"Ye villain! My Chlorid o' Gold!"

Boozy nodded delightedly.

"Just shot the vein full with your old squirt-gun, Doc. Prettiest job ye ever see. Kelly thought he had a million, an' no one could blame him. He had it comin'. Thought nobody could fool him."

"After what I told ye!" McWhinnie's voice was stern, but his eyes twinkled. "I'm an honest man, an' ye mak' me parrty tae ye'er sinfu' contrivances! Ye auld sot, I'm shamed for ye!"

"It was a lovely job, Doc. If I'd just salted it, Kelly wouldn'ta been fooled at all. But I had Natividad roll down a lot of rocks in front of the tunnel. Looked as if it hadn't been touched fer years.

"Then I covered the stones with some o' that quick-growin' moss ye showed me, an' covered the hull thing with spider-webs——"

"Wi' what, ye sinner? D'ye mean tae tell me——"

"Naw, I ain't any eight-legged insect myself, Doc. I just got a bunch o' them little sacks that Old Lady Spider lays her eggs in, an' put 'em among the rocks. When they open, the little cusses come right out an' begin to spin. It's pretty to watch 'em, They made those rocks look like sure-nuff old-timers.

"An' I caught a bunch o' bats in a net, in another old tunnel, an' bottled 'em up in the mine. The dirt inside looked old, too. I got a lot o' stinkin' water out of an old pond, an' dashed it over the rocks an' gravel, Natividad sold me some rich molinette ore he'd dug out somewheres else, an' I stuck that all over the heading. Your chlorid went into the old vein, an' it sure looked rich. Flores an' I had a real hard time puttin' them timbers back so they looked natural. But we slimed 'em over an' dolled 'em up with some more o' your automatic moss."

"H'm! A braw trick!" the doctor mused. "Real honest an' God-fearin', I ca' it. Where did ye get the money tae buy Natividad's molinette an' his labor?"

"Kelly give me two thousand fer showin' him how to do ye out o' the mine," the tramp answered placidly.

"I'm no sure," the Scot reflected, "that I ocht not tae gie ye in charrge. Ye're too smooth tae be at larrge, Bill. I wonder could I find Kelly tae gie him back his money?"

Boozy jumped up in alarm; but gradually a slow grin spread over his features.

"He's gone," he said. "Ye're too late, Doc. Kelly took passage north on a banana boat this mornin'. So ye don't have to kid yerself about trimmin' him."

"Weel, I tell't him the straight truth," McWhinnie reflected. "I said I was skinnin' him. It did look queer, his forcin' thirty thousand intae my pockets. We'll let it lie.

"When all's said, Boozy, ye did me a guid turrn. Hae anither drink. Some day, ma man, I'll figure oot a scheme tae rewarrd ye properly. Did ye bring back my bit syringe?"

Boozy hauled the hypodermic out of a dirty pocket. McWhinnie set it back on its shelf. For the next two hours his hospitality was more lavish than Boozy had ever known it before. It was so lavish that the tramp fell at last into a stupefied slumber.

Grinning down at him, the doctor slipped the grimy, tattered sleeve back from the flabby wrist. He took a vial out of his vest pocket.

"Ye've put me ten thousand tae the guid, Boozy, ma lad," he chuckled, "an' I'm gaun tae rewarrd ye better than ye know. Here's for a starrt!"

He squirted the Gold Cure into Boozy's arm.

The next issue of *Adventure* will be on the stands September 20th, the one after that on September 30th, in accordance with our readers' vote to issue *Adventure* three times a month.

THE DOOM TRAIL

A Five-Part Story Conclusion

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Boarders Away," "Heroes All," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IT WAS on the night of my return, incognito, from France as a refugee to London, that I inadvertently ran to the aid of a man who was beset by cutthroats. He turned out to be Master Juggins, an old friend of my family's, and in gratitude he gave me succor in his home. But I was outlawed everywhere, for I had first trafficked with the Jacobite constituents of Charles, the Pretender, and then quit them, having wearied of popish intrigues.

Master Juggins resolved to use me for my own good, and incidentally advance his fortunes also. He proposed sending me to the new continent of America in the interest of his trade and to assist in counteracting a plot by a certain Andrew Murray, influential in Government and trade circles. I accepted gladly; and so in disguise accompanied Juggins to a meeting of the Lords Commissioners.

It was here that I learned how the opposition stood. Accordingly Juggins secured passage for me on the first boat bound for the New World. I sailed the following Saturday, and discovered to my disgust that Murray, his daughter and his friend de Veulle, a traitor whom I had once humiliated at Paris, were fellow-passengers. Murray was guarded by an ape-like negro, and I was on the lookout for trouble.

De Veulle saw through the disguise I was wearing, and a quarrel started. Shortly afterward some one crept up behind and overpowered me. I struggled, but it was no use. I could not resist the snakelike arms which mastered me. One shifted swiftly to a grip on my legs. I was whirled into the air and dropped clear of the railing—falling—falling, until the cold waters engulfed me.

WHEN I found myself in the water I thought death to be but a brace of minutes away, for I was rapidly growing numb from the cold. By some miracle I chanced upon a rope hanging over the side of the ship, and by it I was able to climb back on board. Once on deck, I seized an iron-tipped hand bar, and sought for the negro. I soon ran afoul of him and laid him low before he had time to recover from his surprize.

Murray and de Veulle witnessed the attack, and our quarrel commenced afresh. At this point Murray's daughter appeared, and though learning the cause of the disturbance set her heart against me. Thereupon we all declared a truce till we should reach New York.

Upon my arrival in the New World I went to a tavern, pending the time for an interview with the governor. As I passed through a side street I saw an Indian chief who was being harried by ragamuffins. These I drove off, and immediately the Seneca, whose name was Ta-wan-ne-ars, and I became fast friends.

Eventually I met Governor Burnet, who welcomed me and read all my documents which I had from Master Juggins. He put me in touch with the trade situation, and I heard also all about the Red Death and the Doom Trail for the first time. The governor explained that this Trail was a secret route established by Murray for smuggling goods into Canada. No one knew just where it ran. Any one who attempted to find it was certain to meet his doom.

This trail was aiding the French in their schemes to gain predominance of trade and ultimately to overthrow the British power in America. In return for his services Murray would receive a dukedom, wealth and great trade concessions.

It developed that my help was needed in securing information regarding a new fort under construction by the French at Niagara; and then the discovery of the Trail itself. I was introduced to Corlaer, an old woodsman and friend to our cause.

On the way back to my lodgings I was set upon by the Red Death—one of Murray's minions. He had very nearly done for me but for the timely rescue of the Seneca.

A few days later I started for Albany with Ta-wan-ne-ars and Corlaer. From there we pushed westward. About nightfall of the first day's tramp along the trail of the Long House, the Indian noticed that we were being followed. We hurriedly prepared an ambuscade and hid in the undergrowth near by.

TOWARD midnight seven Cahnuagas crept out to the clearing where they supposed we were camping. At that the Seneca fired his musket and shrilled his terrifying war-whoop. I fired also, and with one accord we rushed to the attack. We overcame the Cahnuagas in short order and resumed our journey next morning. We finally reached the country of the Senecas, and sought the protection and counsel of Ta-wan-ne-ars' uncle.

We decided to go to the fort at Jagara. I was to masquerade as a Frenchman and Ta-wan-ne-ars as my servant; Corlaer we were to meet later if our venture proved successful. Accordingly after a brief rest we set out. We were welcomed by Joncaire at the fort, and I managed to deceive him completely. I was learning many things about Murray's plans and the Doom Trail when we were interrupted by the unexpected appearance of de Veulle. The Seneca and I were badly caught. We were made prisoner, bound and hurried away to La Vierge du Bois—a famous torture-place inaugurated by Murray and superintended by a French priest. We met once more the Red and Black Deaths and many of our old enemies.

Again I was confronted by Murray and his daughter. This time Marjory began to sense her father's injustice toward me, and she appeared much concerned. Ta-wan-ne-ars and I were then rushed off amid blows and punishment to be prepared for the torment. It developed that we were to be slain at a rite called the Moon Feast.

We were tied to separate stakes and subjected to various kinds of torture. The time came for the dance of Ga-ha-no, the Mistress of the False Faces. She approached us and I heard my Indian brother choke back a groan of love and hate. Her dance ended, the Red Death stepped up to slash Ta-wan-ne-ars with his knife. As he did so a yell checked him, and we all turned to witness the entrance of the Bear!

I TWISTED my neck behind my stake and saw Ga-ha-no draw near in the opening steps of the Bear dance. When she had come very close she whispered to me and disclosed the amazing fact that she was Marjory and not the real Mistress of the False Faces. When our tormentors were least expecting it she released us, and at a word we rushed out. The drunken Indians leaped to the pursuit.

We managed to elude them for a time, and Marjory told us how to make our escape. It was then I declared my love to her and begged her to go with us. But she refused.

Ta-wan-ne-ars and I took flight through the forest, and after many weary days of traveling we reached Fort Oswego. There we met Corlaer again.

About this time a fleet of canoes bearing furs for the French passed on the lake near by. My two friends and I went out on an expedition to attack them. Corlaer succeeded in destroying a number of their boats. Later on we started on the search for the Doom Trail. We finally found it—and the Red and Black Deaths as well. There was a long and bitter fight, and we made an end to them.

In the Autumn we returned to report to Governor Burnet, who had journeyed to Albany. A meeting of the merchants was in session, and the Governor attempted to show them the peril of the trade-war situation—to no purpose. Next Murray appeared unexpectedly and denounced me as a traitor before everybody. But Governor Burnet put the matter aside.

Meanwhile the opposition could not be downed. We all saw then that the only course left was to persuade the people of the Long House to take up arms against the Keepers of the Doom Trail.

Once more Corlaer, my Indian brother and I visited the country of the Senecas. The clans were called together and a council of war was held. The six nations made an oath to wipe out the Trail.

As the preparations for war were begun, word was brought that a Frenchman had arrived with a message for me.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EVIL WOOD

WE FOUND the messenger squatting placidly by the Council-House under the guard of several Onondagas, who obviously did not relish the sight of a Frenchman in their midst during the sitting of the Ho-yar-na-go-war. He put aside his pipe as we approached and stood up. But for his white skin, which was rather dingy under a coating of tan and dirt, 'twould have been difficult to distinguish him from the savages. He was of the usual type of *courrier du bois*, but with an unusually repellant countenance.

"You have a message for me?" I said.

"Are you Monsieur Ormerod?" he replied in his peasant's *patois*.

"I am."

He examined me with a sidewise squint out of his shifty eyes, and fished with one hand in the bosom of his filthy leather shirt.

"You will pay for the service?" he inquired warily.

"Anything in reason," I answered impatiently.

"She said you would pay what I asked," he temporized.

"She! Who?"

My worse fears were confirmed. I took one step forward and grasped the ruffian by the arm.

"Who?" I repeated. "Tell me, if you value your life! And give me the message."

"No offense, no offense, *monsieur*," he growled, pulling away from me. "Mademoiselle Murray——"

"Give it to me," I insisted. "We will talk of pay afterward."

He reluctantly withdrew his hand from his shirt, and offered me a folded square of heavy paper, stained with sweat. I opened it carefully, lest it tear, and saw these lines of fine, angular writing staring me in the face:

> "Montreal, ye 10th Sept., 1725.
>
> You said You wld. come if I calld for You. I Begge you now, in ye Name of All you Holde Deer, help Mee. I am to be Forcd to wed ye Chev. de Veulle. 'Tis ye Price he has Fixd for his Services to Mr. Murray. They have Procurd a Dispensation from ye Bishoppe of Quebec, and wee Retourn now to La Vierge du Bois. They will Marrie me whenne Père Hyacinthe is retournd from a Visitt to ye Dionondadies by ye Huronne Lake. Help Mee. MARJORY.
>
> Do notte Trust ye mesenjer who Carries this, but plese Pay him What he asks. Come by ye waye you Lefte throogh ye Woodde of ye False Faces.

Stunned, I read it a second time, then handed it to Ta-wan-ne-ars.

"What is your name?" I asked the messenger whilst Ta-wan-ne-ars scanned the paper.

"Baptiste Meurier," he said sullenly.

"How long since is it that you started from Montreal?"

"Six weeks more or less. *Monsieur* has been difficult to find."

"More," I decided, remembering the date on the letter. "Do you know what the message said?"

"How should I, *monsieur*?" he objected quickly. "Me, I do not read."

"Was there no other word?"

"*Mais, non.*"

"Who gave you the paper?"

"Who but the *mademoiselle* herself?"

"How did she happen to choose you?"

He protruded his chest.

"Who better could she select than Baptiste Meurier?" he replied. "North of the Lakes every one knows Baptiste Meurier—and I am not unknown to the Iroquois."

"But how did the *mademoiselle* hear of you, Baptiste?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say? I passed by the house of the Baron de Longueuil. One called to me. I entered. A beautiful young person says she has a mission of much importance and profit to be performed. I reply I will go anywhere for a price. I am told I have only to name it. And so I am here, *monsieur*."

"And what is your price?" I inquired, amused despite myself by the cool insolence of the scoundrel.

"Two hundred livres," he said instantly.

"Very well. It shall be paid. You will be detained here for a time, and I will purchase for you a sufficient number of beaver-pelts to defray that sum. Is that satisfactory?"

"Why should I have to wait?" he parried. "*Peste*, Winter draws on fast, and I——"

"You will wait," I cut him off. "And you will be paid."

And, turning to Ta-wan-ne-ars, I asked him to give the necessary instructions to the Onondagas. The messenger, a look of sour satisfaction on his cunning face, was marched off to undergo the restraint of an unwelcome visitor.

"Well?" I said to Ta-wan-ne-ars.

The Seneca returned me the letter.

"See," he said, pointing to the wild geese flying in pairs to the south," the cold weather is coming. For the last week the northern sky has been hard and clear. There has been snow beyond the Lakes."

"What does that mean?" I demanded.

"That Black Robe will be delayed in returning from his visit to the Dionondadies. And that is a very good thing for us, brother. But for that I think we would be too late."

I looked again at the date of the letter.

"How can we have time?" I asked in sudden fear.

"They must have traveled back to La Vierge du Bois after that," he reassured me. "And Black Robe has a long, long journey, with snow underfoot."

"But we shall have fighting," I exclaimed. "The Keepers will soon discover us, and no matter how numerous we may be they will fight desperately. They may carry her away to Canada before we reach La Vierge du Bois."

"That is true," he admitted. "And the thought Ta-wan-ne-ars had, brother, was that we might leave to Do-ne-ho-ga-weh and Corlaer the breaking of the Doom Trail whilst you and I with a handful of warriors marched around by the way we escaped, as the white maiden advises in her letter. That way is not guarded, for none has known it, and perhaps we may hide in the Wood of the False Faces and bear off the maiden in the confusion of a surprize attack."

"It sounds reasonable," I said doubtfully. " 'Tis preferable to trusting to the main attack."

"There is no other plan," he rejoined with energy. "Moreover, as my brother knows, Ta-wan-ne-ars seeks to save Ga-ha-no, too."

The hint of pain in his voice, which was never absent when he spoke of his lost love, shamed me for the instinctive selfishness which had made me concerned only with my own troubles.

"We will not save one without the other," I cried. "No, Ta-wan-ne-ars, do we not owe our lives as much to her as to Marjory?"

"What you say is true," he replied. "But let us not talk of what we will do until the time comes. I hope that the Great Spirit will be lenient with my Lost Soul, yet it may be her time has not come. If it has come we shall save her. If it has not Ta-wan-ne-ars will try again."

"And so will I."

"My brother is generous, as always," he said simply. "Now we must tell what we have learned to Do-ne-ho-ga-weh, and arrange our plans with him."

THE Guardian of the Western Door was the center of an immense mob of warriors who danced around the war-post which had been planted in the Council-Place. Man after man, chanting the deeds he had performed or those he pledged himself to in the future, rushed up and struck the post with his hatchet in token of his intent to participate in the expedition.

The grim face of Do-ne-ho-ga-weh was alight with the joy of battle.

"Behold, O my son," he called to me, "the warriors of the Eight Clans are with us. Our brothers of the Turtle, Beaver, Bear and Wolf, and our younger brothers of the Snipe, Heron, Deer and Hawk, all hunger for the scalps of the Keepers of the Trail.

"A thousand braves will follow us on the war-path. We will give the French a lesson. They shall see the might of the Long House."

But the light faded from his features as Ta-wan-ne-ars told him of the message from Marjory. A look of cold hatred accentuated the grimness of the hooked nose and high cheekbones.

"The French dog de Veulle is wearied of Ga-ha-no," he rasped. "He has had enough of the red maiden. Now he craves the white. Yes, it is well that my red nephew and my white son should go against this man who knows no laws to curb his lust.

"He may think that I am only an Indian, but my fathers have been *roy-an-ehs* and chiefs for more moons than I could count in the whole of a moon. They sat beside the Founders. They took in marriage and they gave in marriage. It is time that this insult to their memory was wiped out. Let it be wiped out in a river of blood. Then, O my nephew and my son, draw his scalp across his trail so that no man can tell he ever passed. I charge you, do not spare him."

"We will not spare him, O *ha-nih*,[1]" I promised.

"Good! It shall be as you ask. Corlaer shall guide me to the Doom Trail. How many warriors are to go with you?"

We debated this point together, and decided that for purposes of swift movement and secrecy we had best restrict our escort to twenty men. Do-ne-ho-ga-weh approved this number.

"Do nothing, if you can help it, until we have begun our attack," he said. "If you must move without us, rely upon flight, for you can not hope to succeed by fighting."

The remainder of that day was devoted to the organization of our party and the instruction of Do-ne-ho-ga-weh and his lieutenants in the geography of the Doom Trail and the bearing of La Vierge du Bois, which, it must be remembered, no hostile tongue had been able to describe until Ta-wan-ne-ars and I had escaped from the clutches of the False Faces.

Our party mustered at dawn the next morning. It consisted of twenty stalwart young Seneca Wolves, each man selected by Ta-wan-ne-ars for strength and wind. Despite the chill of advancing Winter in the air they were stripped to the waist, their leather shirts rolled in packages which were slung from their shoulders. In addition to their clothing and weapons each man also carried two lengthy contrivances of wood, with hide strips laced across them.

"What are they for?" I asked as Ta-wan-ne-ars presented me with a pair and showed me how to fasten them on my back so that the narrower ends stuck up over my head.

"*Ga-weh-ga* — snow-shoes," he replied. "In the wilderness, brother, the snow lies deep, and we should sink down at every step once the ground was covered after the first storm. You must learn how to use the

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[1] Father.

ga-weh-ga, for otherwise you would be helpless."

Few Indians in the long chain of encampments in the Onondaga Valley saw us march forth, and those who did thought we were only an advance scout, for we kept our purpose a strict secret, even from the warriors of our escort. They were told no more than that they were given an opportunity to go upon a hazardous venture which should yield them fame and a proportionate toll of scalps.

That was all they wanted to know. Ta-wan-ne-ars was a leader they had fought under before. I was assigned a wholly undeserved measure of fame because of my recent adventures in his company.

We marched rapidly, taking advantage of the withering of the foliage to abandon the Great Trail and cut across country through the forest, which stood untouched outside the infrequent clearings of the Iroquois. For three days we averaged thirty miles a day, and each day, when we camped, I practised with the snow-shoes on some level bit of ground, learning how to walk without catching the points and tripping myself.

We had not gone very far on the fourth day when O-da-wa-an-do, the Otter, a warrior who had attached himself to me, pointed through the leafless trees toward a grayish-white bank which was rolling down upon us from the north.

"*O-ge-on-de-o*," he said. "It snows."

The word was passed along the line, and Ta-wan-ne-ars ordered the warriors to don their shirts. Fifteen minutes later the snow began to fall. Driven by a piercing wind, it descended like a vast, enveloping blanket, coldly damp, strangling the breath, blinding the eyes, numbing the muscles.

We struggled along against it until we came to a hillside scattered with large boulders. Here we halted and built shelters for ourselves by roofing the boulders with pine saplings we hacked down with our tomahawks. Under these, with fires roaring at our feet, we made shift to resist the cold.

The snow fell for the better part of two days, so thickly as to preclude traveling, and during that time we dared not stir from shelter, except to collect firewood. In the evening of the second day the storm passed, and the stars shone out in a sky that was a hard, metallic blue.

"We have lost much time, brothers," said Ta-wan-ne-ars, "and we have had a long rest. Let us push on tonight."

After the fashion of the Iroquois he always gave his commands in the form of advice; but no warrior ever thought of disputing him.

"I no longer see the Loon above us," I remarked to him as I put on my snow-shoes. "How shall you find your way?"

"The Great Spirit has taken care of that," he answered, and he raised his arm toward the sparkling group of the Pleiades. "There are the Got-gwen-dar, the Seven Dancers. They shine for us in the Winter, and we shall guide our steps by them."

YOUR progress that night and for several days afterward was slowed considerably by my clumsiness on snow-shoes. But The Otter and other warriors went to considerable pains to help me, picking out the easiest courses to follow, quick with hint or advice to remedy my ignorance. I became proficient enough to travel at the tail of the column, although my companions could never march as rapidly as they would have done without me.

After starting we met only one party of Oneida hunters, who had not heard of the decision of the Ho-yar-na-go-war to take the war-path against Murray. The Mohawks had all retired to their villages for the Winter, and the wilderness which was traversed by the Doom Trail was deserted because of the universal Indian fear of the False Faces. Ta-wan-ne-ars and I discussed this point as we neared the forbidden country, and I suggested that he tell his followers our destination.

He waited until we were a long day's march from and well to the northwest of the goal. Then he gathered the warriors about him as they mustered for the trail.

"Soon, O my brothers," he said in the musical, cadenced Seneca dialect which I was beginning to take pleasure in understanding, "we shall strike our enemies. It is a desperate enterprise you go upon. No war-party ever set out to risk such heavy odds. No warriors of the Long House were ever called upon to practise such caution, to reveal such courage.

"O my brothers, we are going into the Wood of Evil, the haunt of the False Faces which is the breeding-place of all the wickedness that brands the Keepers of the

Doom Trail. You will face much that is horrible. You will be threatened with spells and witchcraft. But I ask you to remember that my brother O-te-ti-an-i and I passed through all such perils without harm. Keep your hearts strong."

"*Yo-hay*," muttered the warriors in guttural assent. "We will keep our hearts strong, O Ta-wan-ne-ars."

Their faces were more serious than before, but they exhibited no signs of fear. Several asked questions as to the False Faces and their rites, and we explained to them the false atmosphere of horror which had been spread designedly to protect the traffic of the Doom Trail.

We moved much more cautiously now that we were near our journey's end, with three scouts always in front, one on either flank of the path we trod. But we saw no signs of other men, although many times we came upon bear-tracks. Toward evening we struck the waters of the tumbling little river through which Ta-wan-ne-ars and I had waded that night after Marjory had released us.

Here we rested whilst scouts went ahead as far as the edge of the Evil Wood. They returned to report not a footprint in the snow. We ate a little parched corn mixed with maple-sugar and some jerked meat we carried in our haversacks.

About midnight we all moved forward, Ta-wan-ne-ars leading the line. The oaks and elms, maples and willows, which had composed the elements of the forest, now gave place to tall, funereal firs, whose massive jade-green foliage remained untouched by the icy breath of Winter.

It seemed as if we had entered a different world when they closed around us. The stars had twinkled through the bare branches of the other trees. Here were utter darkness and a far-away, mournful music of wind rustlings and clashing boughs. Grotesque shadows darted vaguely over the white ground as the trees swayed and groaned. In the distance an owl hooted solemnly. The Otter touched my shoulder.

"Did you hear the owl?" he murmured.

"Yes," I whispered back.

"It is cold for an owl to leave his tree-hole."

He threw back his head, and I started at the fidelity of the repetition.

"*Too-whoo-oo! Too-hoo!*"

We listened, but there was no answer. Instead, after a brief interval, the howl of a wolf resounded.

A few yards farther on the owl hooted again. The line halted, and the warrior in front of him whispered that Ta-wan-ne-ars wished to speak with me. I passed by him and several others and came to where the chief stood, peering, or trying to peer, into the night.

"There was something strange about the owl, brother," he said. "The warriors told me that the Otter answered it, yet it did not reply. And then the wolf——"

A yell as of fiends from hell shattered the mantle of silence. Flames spurted through the firs, and in the gleam of the discharges and of torches thrown into our midst I had a fleeting glimpse of hideous masked figures bounding between the tree-trunks.

"Keep your hearts strong, brothers of the Long House," shouted Ta-wan-ne-ars. "They are only Cahnuaga dogs. Stand to it."

He fired as he spoke. I imitated him. Our men shot off a scattering volley. Then the False Faces were amongst us, coming from all sides, springing out of the ground, dropping from the very branches overhead and wielding their *ga-ge-was*, or war-clubs, with dreadful effect.

CHAPTER XXVII

GA-HA-NO'S SACRIFICE

THERE was no time to reload. We fought with ax and knife as best we could. Ta-wan-ne-ars and I, with half a dozen of our warriors, crowded back to back. The rest of our party were cut off in twos and threes.

Resistance was hopeless. The swarms of False Faces seemed to care nothing for death if only they could bring down an Iroquois. They eschewed steel altogether, and battered down opposition with their knotted war-clubs, which shattered arms and shoulder-blades, but seldom killed.

I was knocked senseless by a blow which I partially warded with my tomahawk. When I came to I was lying in the snow in front of a huge fire. My arms were bound and my head ached so violently that I felt sick.

"Is my brother in pain?" asked the voice of Ta-wan-ne-ars.

I rolled over to find him lying beside me, the blood from three or four trivial cuts freezing on his head and shoulders.

"Yes," I groaned, "but 'tis naught."

"There was treachery," he said. "They knew we were coming, and they lost many men so that they might take us alive."

"All our warriors—" I faltered.

He turned his head to the left; and, following his gaze, I saw that I was on the right of a line of recumbent figures, which my dizziness would not permit me to count.

"No, not all, I think," Ta-wan-ne-ars answered after a moment. "Five are slain and fourteen others lie here. But I do not see the Otter."

He addressed the warrior next to him, but none of our fellow-prisoners could account for the Otter.

"The Otter suspected something wrong," I said. "'Twas he who answered the owl's call."

"It may be he escaped," replied Ta-wan-ne-ars. "I must warn our brothers to say naught of him. If the keepers do not suspect, they may believe they have all of us safe in their net."

He whispered his warning to the man beside him, and it was passed down the line.

"Your head is much swollen, brother," he said, rolling over again so as to face me. "Let Ta-wan-ne-ars make shift to bathe it with snow."

A shadow fell athwart us as we lay and a mocking voice replied for me:

"By all means, most excellent Iroquois. I trust you will nurse our valuable captive back to full strength and health."

I struggled to a sitting position, for I liked not to lie at de Veulle's feet, however much I might be at his mercy.

"So you walked into the spider's web," he continued, standing betwixt me and the firelight which ruddied his sinful face. "A woman's plea—and you threw caution to the winds! You fool! I used to value you as an enemy, but 'tis tame work fighting against a man who thinks I keep so easy a watch as to permit our beautiful friend to come and go as she lists."

"The letter was a bait?" I exclaimed incredulously.

"For you—yes. I say again—you fool! Baptiste took the letter to Murray, and Murray read it to me. It could not have been contrived more skilfully to suit our plans."

'Twas ridiculous, no doubt, but I was easier in my heart for assurance that Marjory had not known her appeal was used as a lure. It enabled me to maintain a stoicism of demeanor I did not feel.

"Well, 'twas kind of you to make such haste," he went on, sneering down at me. "You will be in time for the wedding after all. Oh, never fear; you shall be permitted to live that long. We have plenty of meat in this bag to supply diversion for our savages in the mean time.

"You, my friend, and the noble Iroquois here—" he kicked Ta-wan-ne-ars viciously—"shall be kept for the last. Who knows? We may have a new Mistress of the False Faces then. We are not pleased with the present one. There was somewhat uncommonly odd about the circumstances of your escape—although 'tis true I had the little wildcat in my arms at the time—and it would add to the aroma of the mystery to have a white Mistress for a change. Aye, that is an idea worth considering."

He switched suddenly into the Seneca vernacular.

"Are you all here, Iroquois dogs?" he demanded curtly. "The scouts reported twenty warriors."

"All are here, French mongrel," returned Ta-wan-ne-ars pleasantly.

De Veulle kicked him.

"Keep that for the torture-stake," he advised. "We have five corpses and fourteen warriors and yourself. That is all?"

"All," reiterated Ta-wan-ne-ars.

De Veulle passed along the line, cross-questioning each prisoner to an accompaniment of kicks and threats. All told the same story. Next to success in battle nothing pleased an Iroquois more than the opportunity to exhibit indifference to torture. De Veulle seemed satisfied. The mistake he made was in failing to understand that the scouts had not counted Ta-wan-ne-ars, a chief, as a warrior. He returned to my side, and summoned a host of masked figures from the surrounding shadows. They jerked us to our feet, stamped out the fire and escorted us over the trampled, bloody snow where we had fought, through the gloomy aisles of the Evil Wood and into the irregular streets of La Vierge du Bois.

The dawn was a mere hint of pink in the eastern sky, but the Cahnuagas and their allied broods of renegades were all awake to greet us, and our guards forced a passage through the mass with difficulty. To our surprize, we were carried by the oblong hulk of the Council-House, and traversed the Indian village without stopping. Ahead of us loomed the tower of the chapel and the house where Murray dwelt, encircled by its stockade.

TWO men stood by the gate of the stockade to greet us. One was Murray, debonair as ever in a frieze greatcoat, with a showing of lace at the collar, and a cocked hat. The other was Baptiste Meurier.

The unsavory face of the *courrier de bois* grinned appreciation of my astonishment.

"*Peste, monsieur!*" he exclaimed. "It seems you are a slow traveler. I feared I might be behind you, but I arrived twenty-four hours in advance. I have to thank you for the beaver-pelts. They were a sufficient bribe for my immediate release."

"That will do, Baptiste," interjected Murray.

And to me:

"One might think the animal deserved credit for a plan in which he was the humble instrument of superior intellects—which, I am bound to say, displayed their superiority mainly by seizing upon the opening presented to them by fortune. No, no; even had the good Baptiste been delayed we should have been ready for you. Heard you ever, Ta-wan-ne-ars, of scouts who wore bears' pads for moccasins?"

For the first and only time during our acquaintance Ta-wan-ne-ars was surprized into a look of chagrin.

"We thought it was late for bears to be out," he admitted.

Murray chuckled with amusement.

"Quite so, quite so! And so you visit us once more, Master Ormerod. I confess 'tis an unexpected pleasure which we shall strive to make the most of."

"Sir," I said earnestly, "it makes little difference to me what is my fate, but I conjure you by whatever pretensions to gentility you possess to give over your plan of selling your daughter."

He took snuff with his odd deliberation, and his face became as impassive as an Indian's.

"The words you choose for your appeal do not commend it to me," he returned. "Nor do I perceive what business of yours it may be to question my daughter's marriage."

Now, what put it in my head I know not, unless it was the fact that in her letter to me Marjory had spoken of him as "Mr. Murray;" but I leaped to the instant conclusion that she was not his daughter. Sure, no man could have disposed of his own daughter so cold-bloodedly!

"She is not your daughter in the first place," I retorted boldly. "And in the second place, she has expressed to me her abhorrence of the marriage, as you know."

His face revealed no expression but for a faint tremor of the eyelids.

"Zooks," he remarked mildly after an interval of silence, " 'tis strong language that you use. You are a headstrong young man, Master Ormerod. Can it be that you have some personal interest in the matter?"

Again some instinct prompted me.

"I have," I asserted. "Your daughter prefers me to the man you would force upon her."

"Really," he replied, "you possess vast self-assurance. You are my deadly enemy, you have sought by every means to ruin me, you were caught in an attempt to depredate my home—yet you would pose as a suitor for my daughter's hand."

"She is not your daughter," I repeated. "And as a suitor, according to your estimates of the world's opinion, I am far more eligible than this Frenchman."

"You are scarcely wise to say so to his face, and I beg leave to differ with you. I find the Chevalier de Veulle a very eligible young man, of rank in the world, of achievement, of distinct promise for the future."

"If you can call a man eligible who was not even eligible for continued residence at the most profligate court in Europe, I agree with you."

"Tut, tut," remonstrated Murray. "Your words are not those of a gentleman, sir. We will abandon the subject. Where do you propose to incarcerate the prisoners, *chevalier?*"

"I would not risk them a second time in the keeping of the savages," said de Veulle. "Let us try your strong-room. There you and I can have an eye to their security."

"That is well conceived. Is there any news of Père Hyacinthe?"

"I have stationed a man at the river-crossing to bring word the instant he arrives."

"I applaud your thoughtfulness. This continued delay in the ceremony is annoying. Master Ormerod, your sufferings are upon your own head."

I looked eagerly for Marjory's face as we were marched across the yard inside the stockade and through the heavy timber doors of the house. But she was not visible. The house was sturdily built, evidently with an eye to defensibility, and the cellar beneath it, to which we were conducted, was floored with clay and walled with immense wooden slabs. Our guards examined our bonds carefully, fastened our legs and then left us, three of them sitting just outside the door at the foot of the stairs which ran down from the kitchen above.

We remained there three days, without intercourse with any one except our Indian jailers, who brought us messes of food twice daily. In that time the bump on my head was reduced and Ta-wan-ne-ars' cuts began to heal.

On the third day several Cahnuaga chiefs visited us and removed one of our Senecas with an assurance that he was destined for the torture-stake. The man laughed at their threats, and called back to his brothers that he would set them a good example. I do not doubt that he did.

On the fourth day we were eating our meager fare of boiled corn when the door was flung open violently and the gaunt figure of Black Robe entered unannounced. Behind him, obviously unwillingly, walked Murray.

"Which is the Englishman Ormerod?" demanded the priest in French.

"Here I am, father," I answered, standing up as well as I could.

"Mistress Murray tells me that you have won her affections?" he asked coldly.

My heart leaped with sudden joy.

"That is true, father," I said.

"And you love her?"

"As much as a man may, father."

He turned upon Murray with a gesture of decision.

"There!" he exclaimed. "You have it in the face. What do you expect of me? Would you have me violate God's sacrament by wedding a maid against her affections? Some priests might do so, but I will never! Marriage without affection is adultery."

Murray's discomforture was comical. I was quick to seize the opportunity presented to me.

"He knows how we stand, father," I declared. "He himself asked me concerning it when I was brought here."

Père Hyacinthe bent upon Murray a glance of deep disdain.

"This is not well, *monsieur*," he said. "You have told me an untruth."

"You leap to conclusions, my good sir," returned Murray, who had now regained his poise. "The maid does not know her own mind. She is a conquest for the Church, and her alliance with the Chevalier de Veulle cements the great work we are undertaking together."

"I will have naught to do with it," responded the priest with decision. "Not even to admit her into the Church would I tolerate the fastening upon herself, her husband and myself of a mortal sin. As for the Chevalier de Veulle, I will say nothing at present. But I am not satisfied with everything here at La Vierge du Bois. I shall have more to say on that score later."

He went out and up the stairs, and Murray, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

BUT our reprieve was brief. The next morning an augmented force of jailers appeared. The thongs on our arms were tightened; our legs were unlashed; and we were marched up into the wintry sunshine again, our eyes blinking at the unwonted light.

The village was deserted, and we perceived the reason when we reached the Council-Place and saw the long row of stakes which stretched before the background of the green firs of the Evil Wood. Jeers and cries of derision greeted us.

The False Faces strung their ill-omened circle around us, and the feather-tufted Keepers and their women and children pressed close to view the gruesome spectacle. We were bound to the stakes, Ta-wan-ne-ars and I in the middle of the line; and almost at once the torturing began upon the unfortunates at the two extremities. Their songs and shouts of defiance soon gave way to a sinister silence, as they fought with all their will-power to curb the agony which bade them cry for mercy.

The horror of it first sickened me, then flogged me into a red-hot tempest of anger. And in the midst of the orgy of bestiality Murray and de Veulle penetrated the circle of False Faces, with Marjory, white-faced, tight-lipped, between them. They walked up to the stake to which I was bound.

"I deeply regret, my dear," said Murray in a voice which was conscientiously paternal, "that you must be exposed to this spectacle——"

"'Tis no more distressing than the knowledge of your wickedness," she flashed. "You have overset my belief in a cause I had thought holy."

"Well, we will not talk politics if you please," he replied. "I want you to realize now beyond question the fate which awaits this misguided young man upon whom you have been so ill-advised as to pin your affections."

"Would you like to walk nearer the other stakes and study what has been done to the Senecas upon whom the torture has been begun?" suggested de Veulle suavely.

She eyed him with such scorn that even he felt it, for his face hardened appreciably.

"No, sir," she answered; "I shall not be contributing to your entertainment any more than I can help."

Murray addressed me.

"We are making a bargain with the lady, Master Ormerod. She is to renounce her objections to de Veulle, own herself mistaken in her feeling of affection for you—and you are to be permitted to escape when she has sealed her engagements."

"Do not think of it, Marjory," I called to her. "I mind this not at all. And fear not. Help will come to you."

A tinge of color showed in her cheeks, and she stepped to my side.

"I can not let you die, Harry," she said with a sob. "Indeed I will not be able to stand the thinking of it. Better anything—better marriage to this beast—than—than—that!"

"You are wrong," I urged her. "You must not. I should go mad if you did. I should hate myself! I——"

I twisted my head toward Ta-wan-ne-ars beside me.

"Bid her not, brother," I appealed to him. "Tell her I do not fear to pay the price! And why should I escape if you——"

His granite features softened as his eyes met hers. But before he could speak the scene shifted with startling rapidity. There was a bulge in the ring of False Faces, and Ga-ha-no burst into the group.

Dressed in her uniform as Ga-go-sa Ho-nun-as-tase-ta, the kilt and moccasins, she fronted de Veulle with eyes blazing, breast heaving.

"Do you seek now to buy the white maiden with this man's life?" she stormed.

"You have no place here," he replied in the Cahnuaga dialect. "Go away. You will make——"

"You shall not!" she defied him. "You have had your pleasure with me. Now you would like to have a woman of your own color. You shall not! I have been bad. I have forgotten the ways of my fathers. I have betrayed a good man."

She threw a glance at Ta-wan-ne-ars, straining at his bonds.

"For that I am sorry, but it is too late!" she exclaimed. "White maiden," she cried to Marjory, "do not listen to this man. He is more wicked than I—and I am now a creature of Ha-ne-go-ate-geh!"

De Veulle waved his arm toward the attentive circle of False Faces.

"Remove the Mistress," he ordered. "She is hindering the torture."

The False Faces moved forward reluctantly, but Ga-ha-no acted without hesitation. A knife leaped from a fold of her kilt, and she sprang upon de Veulle like the wildcat to which he had likened her. He retreated, and ripped out his own knife.

"Seize her, Murray," he panted in French. "She is insane."

But she closed with him, and the two knives sank home at the same instant. Hers pierced de Veulle to the heart. His drove to the hilt into her right breast, and she staggered back, coughing blood, against the rigid form of Ta-wan-ne-ars, bound fast to the stake.

"Ga-ha-no—was not—worthy of—Ta-wan-ne-ars," she gasped as her head slipped down his chest. "It—is—better—so."

No torture could have distorted his face into the image of frenzied despair which it displayed as he strove uselessly to bend down to her.

"My Lost Soul!" he muttered. "Oh, Ha-wen-ne-yu, my Lost Soul! Oh, Great Spirit, my Lost Soul!"

Marjory crept nearer to me, the horror in her face turning to pity, the tears streaming from her eyes.

"The poor lass!" she cried softly. "The poor, brave lass!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MIGHT OF THE LONG HOUSE

THE silence of consternation gripped the hordes of the Keepers of the Trail. The sea of painted, scowling faces exhibited one frozen expression of awe at the suddenness of the tragedy. Only Murray gave no indication of feeling as he knelt by de Veulle's side.

"Where is Black Robe?" I whispered to Marjory, shivering on my shoulder.

"He went away last night. There was a call from Ga-o-no-geh, a village down the Trail. I think he was tricked."

"Would he——"

Murray stood up, wiping a spot of blood off one of his hands with a laced handkerchief.

"He is gone," he remarked impartially. " 'Twas no more than to be expected. A man can not mix politics with women—especially uncivilized women."

"Give a look to the Indian girl," I urged.

He shrugged his shoulders as if to say it was not worth while; but Marjory stooped over Ga-ha-no, composed the disordered black tresses and closed the wildly staring eyes.

" 'Tis useless, Harry," she said. "She is dead."

"Ga-ha-no—is—dead!" repeated Ta-wan-ne-ars blankly.

His heaving muscles relaxed, and he hung limp in his bonds against the stake.

"At the least, the woman gave you an avenue of escape from an intricate problem," commented Murray. "You do not seem glad, my dear."

"I am not glad," retorted Marjory scornfully. "And I am right content that you should be unable to understand why I will be mourning for her."

"Ah, well, we have never understood each other, have we?" rejoined Murray, taking snuff absent-mindedly. "Come, we will give orders for the removal of the unfortunate pair, and——"

The horror dawned once more in Marjory's face.

"And what?" she gasped.

"You forget, Marjory, that my savage henchmen have work to do," he answered nonchalantly. "I take it for granted that you do not wish to remain and view their labors?"

"You—you would——"

Emotion choked her; but she fought for her self-control.

"You would leave these—these men—Master Ormerod—to—to——"

"And why not?" he replied. "They are enemies. As I have had occasion to tell him ere this, Master Ormerod has sought to contrive my ruin. Why should I spare him?"

"You know not the meaning of humanity, then?" she cried, anger striving with terror for control of her voice.

" 'Tis a word which has divers meanings," he said. "But I am a reasonable man. I am always willing to discuss terms."

"And what might you mean by terms?" I demanded, taking a hand in the conversation.

He deliberated as unconcernedly as if we sat on opposite sides of a table in London, entirely ignoring the huddled corpses at his feet, the line of bodies stiffening in the bitter cold against the stakes and the attendant cordon of Indians whose faces studied his as their fingers itched to resume the torture.

"An undertaking to abandon this wholly barren persecution of my enterprises," he decided. "I should require the signature of Governor Burnet to the document."

"And my companions here?" I asked curiously.

"You forget that even my powers are necessarily limited," he said. "I could not possibly snatch from my people's vengeance Iroquois warriors taken red-handed in an attempt to massacre them."

I laughed.

"You do not yet know me, Murray."

"Possibly you are subject to education," he retorted, buttoning up his greatcoat. "Come, Marjory."

She drew away from him.

"I choose to remain," she said coldly.

"I choose that you shall not."

He waved his hand in an unmistakable signal of release to the watchful False Faces and their followers. A yell of satisfaction swelled from their hungry throats, and they dashed forward. Indeed, so violent was their reaction from the restraint just imposed upon them that in the first mad rush a number of the younger men were carried beyond control of the evil priests and commenced to butcher the Senecas outright with knife and tomahawk.

Marjory shrank back and covered her eyes with her hands as a feather-tufted warrior ran up to Ta-wan-ne-ars and dangled a freshly severed scalp in his face.

" 'Twill be difficult for me to control them at all in a few moments," observed Murray.

"Oh, you vile coward!" exclaimed Marjory, her own courage now regained. "I am steeped in shame whenever I remember that I have in my veins blood that is akin to yours."

"You are unreasonable, my mistress," he remonstrated. "I am giving the young man a chance for his life."

He addressed me directly.

"You will bear me out, Master Ormerod, that I warned you life on the frontier was not pretty. We who deal with the savages must employ measures designed to strike their imaginations. We can not be overdainty. We——"

He looked up in amazement, as a mantle of silence enveloped the Council-Place for the second time.

"O MY people," boomed a harsh voice in the Cahnuaga dialect, "verily Ha-ne-go-ate-geh has claimed you! You are mad! You toy with your enemies here when the warriors of the Long House are as thick along the Doom Trail as the falling leaves of Autumn. The Keepers who were on watch are dead or in flight. At any minute the Iroquois will be here. They have burned Ga-o-no-geh. The snow of the Trail is trampled flat by their multitudes. Aye, the Doom Trail is bringing doom upon its Keepers."

The tall, severe figure of Black Robe pushed through the surrounding masses of renegades until he had reached Marjory's side.

"What have they done to you, my daughter?" he asked kindly, his tone changing as if by magic. "I was led away by a false story."

She pointed down at the corpses of Ga-ha-no and de Veulle. Père Hyacinthe made the sign of the cross and muttered a brief prayer.

"Providence works mysteriously," he sighed. "Once I trusted this man—" and he swung around with stern hostility upon Murray—"and this one here. Now I think I know them for what they were, servants of evil who employed the force of God's holy Word in the furtherance of their own wicked plans.

"France is great, my daughter. France has a destiny before her. But her greatness and her destiny may not be reached through by-paths of sin and evil-doing."

He would have said more, but Murray intervened.

"I will answer your personal comments at a future time, sir," he said; "but do I understand you to say that the Doom Trail has been penetrated by the Iroquois?"

"They are almost at your door," replied Black Robe sternly.

" 'Sdeath!" swore Murray. "This is too much!"

He raised his voice in a shout.

"To your arms, O Keepers of the Trail! The Iroquois are upon us!"

But his words were drowned in a racket of firing from the heart of the Evil Wood. A number of the False Faces emerged from the shelter of the firs, their awful masks wabbling unsteadily.

"The People of the Long House!" they wailed. "The People of the Long House are come!"

"We are attacked back and front," snarled Murray. "Well, Master Ormerod, you and your friend the chief are excellent hostages."

He bellowed a series of commands which brought some degree of order out of the confusion, and dispatched one party of Keepers into the Wood to resist the attack from that quarter. Another body he sent through the village to hold the approaches of the Doom Trail. Under his directions the remainder of the warriors unbound the surviving prisoners from the stakes and escorted us to the stockaded house in which he dwelt.

As we passed the chapel we saw Black Robe standing in the doorway. His eyes were fixed upon the heavens.

"You were a chosen people!" he cried. "You were the few selected from the many! The Word of God was brought to you, and you saw the light—or said you did. Your feet were set upon the narrow way. A great work was given you to do.

"But you wandered far afield, back into unexplored realms of the ancient wickedness of your race. You became devil-worshipers in secret; aye, eaters of human flesh. You lived a life of deceit. You became tools of Ha-ne-go-ate-geh.

"Great was your fall, and great will be your punishment therefor. You will be torn up, root and branch. You will be banished from your villages and exiled to a strange country. Your warriors will die under the tomahawk, your children will be reared by your enemies. You will perish, O Keepers of the Trail! Your end is——"

Cowering under the whip-lashes of his words, the Keepers hurried by the chapel, and ran us inside the stockade. In the doorway they paused to await the coming of Murray. He arrived presently, with Marjory hanging unwillingly on his arm.

"The prisoners?" he rasped in answer to the question of our guards. "Take them to the cellar. Look to their security if you value your lives."

An echo of distant shouts reached our ears as we stood there, and across the posts of the stockade we saw the Keepers streaming from the Evil Wood and at their heels certain darting, quick-moving figures that we knew must be the warriors of the Eight Clans.

"It is time to bring our women and children inside the stockade," proposed one of the Cahnuagas.

Murray shook his head.

"We have not room nor food to spare," he refused with iron determination.

Discontent showed in the faces of the Keepers, for even these fiends knew the instinct of domestic affection; but Murray cut off attempts at protestation.

"See," he said, as the sound of firing came from the southward, "we are surrounded. We are ignorant of the strength of the Iroquois. It may be all we can do to defend ourselves. Women and children would be so many inconveniences to us."

And whilst a squad of savages conducted us to our prison the rest manned the firing-platforms around the stockade and prepared to cover the retreat of the Keepers, who were falling back rapidly before the hard-driving attacks of the Iroquois.

I sought for a word with Marjory as we entered the door, but Murray deliberately strode between us. All I gained was a glance from her eyes that bade me be strong and confident. And I needed all the strength and confidence I could obtain during that dreadful afternoon and night in the cellar, with the shouts of the opposing sides and the discharges of their muskets the sole tidings to reach us of what went on above.

Ta-wan-ne-ars sat with his back to a wall, his eyes fixed on vacancy, his lips murmuring at intervals Ga-ha-no's name. I tried to interest him in what went on without success. He looked at me, and turned his eyes away.

In desperation I struggled with two of our eight surviving comrades to untie our bonds, and after hours of trial we succeeded and released the others. This permitted me to pay attention to those who had been injured. One had a broken shoulder, the result of a blow from a war-club the night we were captured. One had been partially scalped at the stake, and three had been hacked and cut in the preliminary stages of torture.

WE SLEPT little that night, for we were very cold and we had no food. But in the morning the Keepers thrust a pan of corn-mush within the door and we ate it to the last kernel. I forced a portion upon Ta-wan-ne-ars, feeding him with a stick we found on the floor.

After that we slept for several hours, and then a lanthorn gleamed on the stairs and Murray stepped into our midst, an immaculate periwig on his head, his linen spotless, his brown cloth suit as fresh as if direct from the tailor's hands.

He set the lanthorn on the dirt floor and stood beside it.

"A good morrow to you, Master Ormerod," he began. "I have come to hold counsel with you."

"'Tis more than kind," I observed sarcastically.

"Nay, 'tis no more than a proposition of business," he returned coolly. "Look you, my friend, we each of us have that which the other wants. In such a case sensible men come to terms."

"If I remember rightly you were speaking of terms only yesterday," I said dryly.

"True, and naturally I was not then disposed to yield you much."

"I would not trust you now on any terms," I said flatly.

"Tut, tut, sir. Is that language for one gentleman to employ to another?"

"You are not a gentleman, sir; you are——"

He glowered.

"Have a care, sir," he warned.

"You are a scoundrel," I finished.

He made a gesture of magnificent disdain.

"Let it pass, let it pass. Your opinion, Master Ormerod, is of little moment to me. What I seek is an accommodation of our mutual desires."

"As how?"

He pursed his lips.

"Look you, Master Ormerod," he replied, "I have you fast here. I have also the chief, your friend. I have in addition one you love."

"Before you proceed further," I interrupted, "I wish you to answer me one question: Whose child is she?"

He hesitated, and regarded me sidewise.

"Oh, well," he said after a moment, "it might as well out now as later. She'd tell you herself, I suppose. The maid is the child of my sister."

"And her name?"

"She is a Kerr of Fernieside," he answered pompously. "I should add, sir, that I have been at particular pains with the girl, having an especial affection for her."

"Oh," I murmured politely. "An especial affection."

"Even so."

He bowed elegantly.

"I have treated her as my own daughter. Her father was lost in the '15, and since then, seeing that her mother was dead, I have made her my charge. She hath been well educated in a dame's school in Edinburgh."

"Well, of that we will say no more," I said. "I find it unpleasant to hear you talk of her."

He frowned, but made no reply.

"You consider us as hostages, then?" I continued.

"Yes. I might as well admit to you that I am surrounded here. The Iroquois have sent out the largest war-party ever I saw."

"You are helpless, but you attempt to impose terms," I said.

"Pardon me, sir; I am not helpless," he objected. "If the worst comes to the worst I shall give intelligence to my opponents of my intent to blow up my house and my hostages and undertake to fight a way through the Iroquois. Better a death in such fashion than captivity and disgrace, let alone the torture-stake."

I considered this, and gaged him as capable of doing all that he said.

"Yes," I assented finally; "being what you are, you have advantages on your side. What are your terms?"

"A safe-conduct for me and my people to Canada."

"So that you may restore your trade again?"

A look of sorrow flitted over his face.

"I can not restore it, Master Ormerod. That fact is indisputable. My one hold upon public opinion was my success and the power it gave me. Let me fail and lose my power, and my influence is dead."

"Yes," I agreed; "that is true."

"Moreover," he went on, "my savages are killed or scattered. My organization is gone. My most valuable servants are slain."

"And Mistress Marjory?"

He regarded me oddly.

"Do you care to sue for her hand?" he parried.

"I shall wed her, if she pleases," I responded; "but I do assure you, sir, I have no intent to approach you in the matter."

"You make a grave mistake then. I should like to settle upon her a jointure proportionate to her birth and heritage."

My first sensation of amusement was turned to ridicule.

"Murray," I said, "you seem not to understand that honest men and women want nothing of your bloody, ill-gotten money. I know that Mistress Marjory will uphold me in this. All we ask of you is that you should disappear, erase yourself."

He flushed, but had himself in hand immediately.

"You have insulted me more than enough, sir," he said with dignity. "Let us end this interview. Are you prepared to go outside the stockade and secure consent to the terms we have discussed, giving your word of honor to return here afterwards?"

I bowed.

"I will do so, but first permit me to acquaint my companions."

And as rapidly as I could I informed the Senecas of the upshot of our talk. All heard it with relief, save Ta-wan-ne-ars.

His somber eyes looked through and beyond me.

"My Lost Soul!" was his response. "I must seek my Lost Soul, brother!"

"In time," I assured him gently. "Do you bide here and await me, and presently you shall go hence and seek her if you wish."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BARRING OF THE DOOM TRAIL

"QUA, O-te-ti-an-i!"

Do-ne-ho-ga-weh's right arm was lifted in the salute. The little group of Indians standing at his side on the fringe of the woods overlooking the smoking ruins of La Vierge du Bois repeated the greeting. Corlaer, his broad face with its insignificant, haphazard features shining with emotion, grasped my hand and wrung it heartily.

"You hafe der lifes of a cat, my friendt!" he exclaimed. "We hafe foundt der torture stakes with der bodies of some of your party andt——"

He paused and glanced at Do-ne-ho-ga-weh. The Guardian of the Western Door drew himself up proudly.

"Ga-ha-no did wrong," he said, "but she died as became the daughter of a *roy-an-eh* of the Long House."

"She died like a warrior," I replied.

"O-te-ti-an-i makes the heart of Do-ne-ho-ga-weh very glad," acknowledged the *roy-an-eh*. "Can he still my fears for my nephew?"

"Ta-wan-ne-ars fought like a chief," I answered. "But his heart was made very sad by the death of Ga-ha-no and his mind has wandered from him for a space."

"It will return," affirmed Do-ne-ho-ga-weh. "Now tell us, O my white son, do you come hither as a captive or a conqueror?"

"I come to offer the terms of Murray; but first tell me how successful you have been, so that I may know whether I should advise acceptance of what he offers."

Do-ne-ho-ga-weh swept his arm around the horizon.

"Everywhere you see ashes and destruction," he replied. "The Keepers of the Trail are dead or imprisoned in Murray's stockade. Their women and children are our prisoners. Our belts can scarcely support the loads of scalps we have taken. We have swept the Doom Trail."

A new figure stepped forward—modestly, as became a young warrior in the company of *roy-an-ehs* and chiefs. 'Twas the Otter. He too saluted me.

"We thought that you escaped the ambush," I said. "You did well. Great will be the fame of the Otter."

He selected two from a bundle of scalps at his belt and held them aloft.

"Two pursued the Otter when he ran from the Evil Wood," he boasted. "But none returned to tell the way he took. The Otter hastened day and night, O my white brother, O-te-ti-an-i, hoping he might bring warriors to rescue you from the Keepers."

"The Otter did well," I repeated. "Had it not been for him, Murray might have been able to flee to Canada. As it is, the warriors of the Long House have surrounded him. He wishes only to save his life. Harken to the terms he offers."

They listened without comment to Murray's proposition.

"But we have a hostage, also," objected Do-ne-ho-ga-weh when I had finished. "We have been holding him for the torture-stake. Perhaps Murray will be willing to accept less when he learns that we have taken Black Robe."

"No, Black Robe means nothing to Murray," I said.

And I described the clash between the two rulers of La Vierge du Bois over the wedding of Marjory.

"It does not matter," commented Do-ne-ho-ga-weh. "Black Robe is our enemy, and we will torture him to avenge our warriors who have perished here at the stake."

"No, no," I objected. "You must let him go. The Great Spirit has set his seal upon him. Twice before this he has been tortured, yet he still lives."

"The third time may be the last," insisted Do-ne-ho-ga-weh, and the other chiefs murmured agreement with him.

"Will my father yield the life of Black Robe to me as a special gift?" I tried again. "He befriended the maiden I hope to marry. I should like to set him free."

They consulted together, and Corlaer urged my cause. In the end Do-ne-ho-ga-weh assented because, he said, I had brought good luck to the Long House and this was the first favor I had requested.

"And now," he concluded, "take back this message to Murray, my white son. Tell him that he is to surrender his house as it stands, with all it contains. Tell him that he is to give up to us the maiden he calls his daughter, whom you desire to wed. Tell him that he is to send forth the prisoners he has taken. Tell him that he is to render up all the arms he has in his possession.

"And then he and those of the Keepers of the Trail who are left to him shall march out, and the People of the Long House will escort them to Jagara, where they shall be handed over to Joncaire to dispose of as pleases Onontio and the French.

"*Na ho!*"

I said good-by to them, and tramped back across the clearing to the stockade above which waved a white napkin fastened to a ramrod. Murray awaited me just within the gate. The Keepers, in their fantastic feather headdresses, crouched on the firing-platform and peered down at us fearfully. Splotches of blood in the dirty snow showed where several of them had been killed by the plunging fire of the Iroquois from the trees which rimmed the clearing.

Murray heard my report in silence, and cast his eye over the surrounding scene before replying.

"It shall be done," he said at last. "Was ever a man so sorely tried by fate? Zooks, 'twill cost me a pretty penny and no slight effort to recoup my fortunes."

I regarded him with amazement.

"Do you think to be tolerated hereabouts in the future?" I asked.

"Hereabouts? It may be so; it may not be," he answered musingly. "But my star is no ordinary star, Master Ormerod. And despite my demerits, which seem to have impressed you unduly, if you will allow me to say so I am not entirely without certain capacities which are valuable in adversity."

"The devil looks out for his own!" I ejaculated rudely.

"Needs must, if the devil drives," he countered. "Ah, well, we are simply headed toward another fruitless bicker. You are strangely burdened by that animus which the clergy dub conscience. Your judgment is biased."

"Where you are concerned."

"I fear so," he deplored. "Let us set a term to this debate. Does our treaty go into effect at once?"

"Yes."

"So be it. I will give orders to have your friends conducted here."

THE battered remnants of our war-party appeared with Ta-wan-ne-ars walking in the lead, his face once more a study in impassive rigor.

"Murray says we are free, brother," he said, stepping to my side.

"It is true."

The sadness shone momentarily in his eyes.

"I have had a bad dream, brother," he went on.

" 'Twas no dream," I cried. "Do not doubt your sorrow, Ta-wan-ne-ars. It was——"

"It was a dream," he answered steadily. "My Lost Soul is redeemed by Ha-wen-ne-yu and is gone on before me for a visit to Ata-ent-sic. But in a little time, when I am rested, I shall go after her and fetch her back to dwell happily with me in my lodge."

"But how can you, a mortal, journey into the hereafter?" I protested.

"Did I not tell you an old tale of my people of a warrior who ventured to the Land of Lost Souls? O my brother, the Great Spirit is generous. He recognizes courage and true love. If I am daring of everything, surely he will stand my aid and help me into Ata-ent-sic's country."

"It can not be!"

"How shall we know it can not be until we have tried? Ta-wan-ne-ars will try."

I could say no more. Such simple faith was unanswerable. And as I watched him, quietly directing the piling of the weapons of the Keepers and the unbarring of the gate in the stockade, I wondered how much of it was the unconscious working on a sensitive mind of the very Christianity he had rejected.

Marjory's voice recalled me to the present.

"Master Murray tells me he hath surrendered," she said.

I turned eagerly to find her at my side. My hands leaped out for hers, and she yielded them without hesitation, her brave eyes beaming love and comradeship unashamed.

"Yes, we are free, Marjory. Will you come with me——"

She caught my meaning, and made to pull away from me.

"But we will have had no wooing," she exclaimed, half between laughter and tears. "Sure, sir, you will not be expecting a maid to yield without suit?"

I would not let her go.

"Every minute that hath passed since I stepped into the main cabin of the *New Venture* to see the face of the mysterious songbird hath been a persistent suit," I declared.

"And you would really wed an unrelenting Jacobite?" she murmured.

"Whatever you are I love you, and as a reformed Jacobite I can see reasons for forgiving your contumacy."

Her face grew serious.

"As I told you once before—" and she shuddered with the memory of the incident —"I have learned much since leaving Scotland. I know that you are no traitor and your beliefs are honorable and patriotic, and that Country means more than King. But, Harry, you will be overlooking the narrowness of a poor maid brought up in a Scots Jacobite household to consider the Stuart cause sacred—will you not?"

"So sweet a recantation!" sneered Murray at my elbow. "He will never be able to resist you, my dear."

She withdrew so that I stood between her and her uncle.

"I have supported much from you, sir," she answered coldly; "in part through mistaken loyalty to the object you said you served; in part because, evil though you were, you were my flesh and blood. But from this day I disown you. I will be having naught to do with you. You mean nothing to me. You are a horrid specter I expel from my mind."

He shrugged his shoulders.

" 'Tis a fitting reward for the loving care I gave you, Mistress Marjory. You are with me until my fortunes wane. Well, I am content. Henceforth Andrew Murray plays his own hand alone. Yet it suits me, my children, to annoy you to the extent of assuring you my blessing and good wishes.

"You are a fine, healthy maid, Marjory. As for Master Ormerod, he hath been a resourceful enemy, and as the first man to cry 'Checkmate!' against me I congratulate him."

Ta-wan-ne-ars tapped him on the shoulder, and he swung around to meet the frowning gaze of the Seneca.

"You are a prisoner, Murray. Come with Ta-wan-ne-ars."

" 'Sdeath, I was to have safe-conduct!"

"You are to go safely to Jagara—yes," I interposed; "but think not we will trust you at liberty."

He took snuff and dusted his lapels carefully.

"Have your way, noble Iroquois," he sighed. "A little while, and I shall be quit of you."

THE warriors of the Long House came pouring through the gates of the stockade, and their war-whoops echoed over the forest as they commenced the work of looting Murray's establishment and secured their prisoners. As Marjory and I passed out of that sinister enclosure, which had seen so much of wickedness and human suffering, we had our last joint glimpse of Andrew Murray. The Otter was lashing his arms at his back, and on his face was a look of whimsical distaste.

"Farewell, my children," he called. "Bear in mind 'twas Andrew Murray brought you together. So good cometh out of evil."

Marjory shrank closer against my side.

"Yes," she said; "take me away from here. Let us go away, Harry—and forget."

BUT 'twas Corlaer, and not I, who escorted my lady to Albany and the tender care of Mistress Schuyler, into whose charge Governor Burnet most kindly commended her. For duty commanded me to discharge my obligation of removing Murray and his Cahnuagas—not many survived the castigation of the Iroquois—in safety to Jagara; and I must accompany Do-ne-ho-ga-weh and Ta-wan-ne-ars and the warriors of the Eight Clans in the triumphal procession which traversed the Long House from the Upper Mohawk Castle to the shores of the Thunder Waters as an illustration of the wrath of the Great League.

And I was not sorry that I did so, for it enabled me to sit beside Do-ne-ho-ga-weh and his brother chiefs in the half-finished stone fort at Jagara and hear him lay down the law of the Long House to Joncaire, as representative of the French.

"Qua, O Joncaire, mouthpiece of Onontio who rules at Quebec," he said. "We People of the Long House come to you in peace. And we give into your hands the white man Murray and those who are still alive of the Keepers of the Doom Trail. We promised that they should come here, and we have fulfilled our promise. But we have set a bar across the Doom Trail, O mouthpiece of

Onontio, and we desire you to tell the French of that.

"If Onontio chooses, we will live in peace with him, and—" this was a crafty use of an advantage I had forced upon him—"in earnest of our friendship we have saved the life of the Frenchman called Black Robe, although he has been no friend of our people. But the Doom Trail is closed to red men and white men, alike. We have obliterated it. We have set a bar across it.

"It is our wish that you should acquaint Onontio with our decision. We ask him to assist us in wiping out this source of trouble between us.

"*Na ho!*"

"I have heard your message, O *roy-an-ehs* and chiefs of the Long House," replied Joncaire. "I will repeat it to Onontio, but I do not think it will be welcome in his ears. As to the white man Murray, why do you bring him to me? He is English. You should carry him to the English at Albany."

"He asked to be brought to you," returned Do-ne-ho-ga-weh, and thus spiked an adroit attempt to shift the implied responsibility for Murray's enterprises in the past.

"Very well," said Joncaire. "You may leave him here. Do you enter any charge against him?"

"We might enter many charges against him," answered Do-ne-ho-ga-weh grimly. "But we pledged our word to bring him here in safety—and we have washed away the stains of his offenses in the blood of the Keepers of the Trail."

"He shall tell his story to Onontio," replied Joncaire, politely threatening. "I am pleased with your assurances of peacefulness. I have no more to say."

But as the Iroquois were leaving he buttonholed me in the sallyport.

"I know you, my lad from Arles," he said jocosely. "I knew you the minute I laid my eyes on you. You have played ducks and drakes with high policies in your few months on the frontier. I hope your people appreciate you."

I laughed and returned his compliment. He waxed serious.

"For myself I am not so sorry this has happened," he declared. "I'll fight the English any day—and beat them, too. But I like not this stealthy intriguing by crime, by perverting the poor savages, by downright cruelty and superstition. This fellow de Veulle, now——"

"He's dead," I interrupted.

"*Ma foi*, you seem to have made a clean sweep of it, Jean! You are a lad after my own heart. De Veulle, he was a bad one. He cast discredit on France. I am glad you disposed of him. Let us fight clean and win clean, I say. Do you tell that to your governor."

"I will," I promised, laughing.

"You haven't a chance, you know," continued Joncaire gravely. "Not a chance."

"It seems to me you once told me at some length of the importance of the fur-trade," I suggested.

"*Peste!* Did I? Well, it has its place, lad. But if you have rooted out that excrescence at La Vierge du Bois we have a tight little fortalice here at Jagara. 'Twill serve, 'twill serve. And you English have no imagination. Once in a while you get a good man—Burnet, for example. But you do not trust him, and you invariably have your Murrays who want another king than his Majesty who sits in London and will pay any price we ask for promises of help we never keep.

"Must you be going? Adieu, then! And do not be setting any of your neat snares for me, Monsieur l'Arlesien."

CHAPTER THIRTY

FROM PEARL STREET TO HUDSON'S RIVER

THE sun bathed the dust of Pearl Street wherever it could steal between the layers of the thick-leafed boughs overhead. I lounged on the doorstep of our cozy, red-brick house by the corner of Garden Street, and reread the letter from Master Juggins which the supercargo of the Bristol packet had delivered a half-hour earlier.

> My Hart is reejoiced, deare Lad, at ye Excelant report of you which is come From Governour Burnet. Granny was so Plesed she sang untill ye Prentises sent word above-stares Beseching a Treate of ale which ye Swete Soul dispached at once. I have This Day taken out ye Papers of partnership in Your name, and when this Reches you ye sign above ye Doore will run as Juggins & Ormerod.
>
> Murray's discomfitur hath had Exceding Advantageous efects in ye Citie and ye Marchaunts who Earley did Clamor for ye freedom of Trade with ye French are now Perceveinge how ye Planne of Governour Burnet did Sette to their Profit in ye Longe Runne. Use your Own Judgmente, I praye you, in developping ye Provincial Trade and draw Upon mee at will for what Funds you Maye need.

> Grannie and I do send you our Love and Respect and She biddes me say she Considders 'Twas y^e Actte of Godde I was sette Upon in y^e Mincing Lane what time you Came to my Rescue. We desire that you and Mistress Marjory may Deem y^e house in Holbourne your home and 'twould deelight our Eyes might we See you Here. Butte of that you will bee y^e Judges. Y^e New World is y^e world for Youth, of that There can bee no Dispute.
>
> I do Enclose y^e Miniature of your Mother which an Agente hath secured from y^e Jew on y^e Quai de l'Horloge in Paris as you Tolde mee and Agane do Salute you with Afectionate Regarde and asure you and your Wife all y^e Love that Words may encompass.

I drew the miniature from my pocket and recalled the damp, wintry day in Paris I had made up my mind to quit the Jacobite cause and try my fortune at all risks in England; the pang with which I had abandoned the last link remaining with my dead parents; the rough trip in the smuggler's lugger; the wet landing at night on the dreary Channel coast; the fruitless attempts to enlist the aid of former friends; the hue and cry my upstart cousins had raised; the flight to London; the——

"Ha, there, Ormerod!"

I looked up to see the burly figure of Governor Burnet rounding the corner. He waved a handful of papers at me.

"The packet hath brought great news!" he cried.

"What is it, your Excellency?"

"The Lords of Trade have seen the light, —— 'em! After we had overridden 'em and pounded sense into their thick heads with mallets, by gad! But they are coming around to our view, and for that a humble provincial governor should be thankful, I daresay. Do but hark to this!"

And, standing with legs spread apart in the middle of the paved sidewalk, he read:

"And seeing that the resentment of the Six Nations is so deeply stirred by reason of the tabling of the law, we are resolved that the provincial Government shall have authority to impose the duties upon trade-goods for Canada as before. And his Excellency the governor shall be required to file a complete report of the situation with such addenda, facts and statistics relative to amounts and totals of trade and fluctuations therein in the recent past as may be helpful to their lordships in reaching a final decision in this matter."

He shook the paper with a quaint mixture of derision and satisfaction.

"A final decision, forsooth! The plain truth, Ormerod, is that the protests of the French Court have aroused our merchants at home to a realization of the dangers they ran, and now that Murray is defeated and broken his friends and fellow-plotters have no reason for pushing their intrigue. 'Tis a commentary, indeed, upon the brains we have at Whitehall. I say naught of the City men, who after all can not be expected to be familiar with politics and the interplay of national ambitions.

"There is more of the same tone as that I read, but I will not burden you with it. Do but wait until I write them, as I shall by the first sailing, that the price of beaver is declined again at Montreal to half our quotation at Albany. Aye, and that we are sending into the wilderness country this Summer twice the number of traders who went out last year.

"But I am selfishly occupied with my own interests, Ormerod. Here is a matter which more nearly concerneth yourself."

He produced a large rolled sheet of parchment, imposingly enscrolled, across the top of which ran the legend:

A Free Pardon

" 'Twas bound to come," he rambled on. "Do you go within and show it to Mistress Ormerod."

But Marjory had been listening at the window, and as I opened the door she fell into my arms and clung there, sobbing for the relief that came to both of us with the lifting of the menace which had overhung my life so long.

"There, there," admonished the governor. "Gadslife, what does the girl weep for?"

"Be-be-because—I am—so—happy," answered Marjory.

"Heaven help us should you weep for grief!" he exclaimed. "And what will you say when I tell you I am come likewise to summon your husband to attend for the first time as a member of the Council?"

His rubicund face gleamed with pleasure at the joy he had inspired in two hearts.

"Tut, tut, 'tis nothing," he pursued his discourse. "I do but serve myself. I have been housecleaning this past Spring. There were rats in the Council who sought to trip me in the days you know of. They are gone. Ormerod should have had a seat ere this, but 'twas best to await the pardon."

"I am so happy I know not what to do,"

protested Marjory, wiping her eyes. "But, oh, see who comes!"

WE FOLLOWED her pointing finger; and there, striding between the ordered house-fronts of Pearl Street, exactly as I had seen him the first time we met, came Ta-wan-ne-ars, the eagle's feather slanting from his scalp-lock, the wolf's head of his clan insignia painted on his naked chest. His grave face was smiling. His right arm was raised in salute.

"*Qua*, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go! *Qua*, friends! Ta-wan-ne-ars greets you."

"You are just arrived?" I asked.

"This hour landed, brother, from the river-sloop."

"Have you any frontier news?" questioned the governor, alert as always for tidings of his distant dominions.

"Only news of peace. The frontier is quiet. The Doom Trail is closed. Do-ne-ho-ga-weh and To-do-da-ho say to Ga-en-gwa-ra-go that the French have forgotten the threats they made. The Covenant Chain was too strong for them, and so long as the English and the People of the Long House keep their hands clasped the peace will endure."

"I told the French that the People of the Long House had the right to destroy a force which assailed their interests," responded the governor. "And his Majesty my King sent word to the French King that my words were straight."

"Ga-en-gwa-ra-go is a friend to the Great League," rejoined the Seneca. "His fame as a truth-teller and a covenant-keeper has gone broadcast. The far tribes are traveling to Albany to offer their allegiance and friendship to him. The fur-trade is once more under control of the English and the Long House."

"We have waited long for you to visit us, brother," I said. "Now that you have come we shall make you stay many moons."

His smile became sad.

"It can not be. Ta-wan-ne-ars comes to say good-by."

"Good-by?"

"Yes, brother. Have you forgotten the search for my Lost Soul?"

"But she is dead!"

"She is with Ata-ent-sic."

"What is this that you speak of?" demanded the governor.

And we told him the story of Ga-ha-no, while the sunshine mottled the dust of Pearl Street and the life of the little town droned sleepily under the trees.

Master Burnet drew a deep breath when the tale was finished.

"You really believe you may find this Land of Lost Souls out there—" he motioned over the scattered house-tops toward Hudson's River—"beyond the setting sun?"

"The ancient tales of my people say that I may," replied Ta-wan-ne-ars.

"And why not?" returned the governor. "God alone—and I say it with all fitting reverence—knows what lies beyond the wilderness country.

"Go, Ta-wan-ne-ars. Seek your Lost Soul. Even if you do not find the shadow land of Ata-ent-sic, you may find wonders that your people and mine have never dreamed of."

"Yes," said the Seneca. "Ta-wan-ne-ars will go. What is life but a search? Some men seek scalps. Some men seek beaver-pelts. Some men seek honors as leaders and orators. Some men seek truth.

"Ta-wan-ne-ars seeks his Lost Soul. He has no fear. He will go through Da-ye-da-do-go-war, the Great Home of the Winds, where Ga-oh, the Wind Spirit, dwells. He will go through Ha-nis-ha-o-no-geh, the Dwelling-Place of the Evil-Minded. He will go to the world's end if the Great Spirit will but guide his footsteps."

"Oh, I pray that you may find what you seek," cried Marjory, the tears in her eyes again. "But sure, you will stay with us a little while?"

"I will go at once, Sister Ne-e-ar-go-ye"—he called her the Bear in memory of her exploit in rescuing us from the False Faces—"now that I have seen my white friends."

"Stay with us a while," she pleaded.

"You would not ask me if you knew how my heart hungered for her whom I have lost," he answered.

"Then go," said Majory quickly. "And God bless you."

"*Hi-ne-a-weh,*[1] O, my sister. It is time. I have been delayed overlong. There were many things for Ta-wan-ne-ars to do before he could go. The affairs of the Long House required attention. The guard of the Western Door must be secured. But from this day I shall turn my face to the setting sun, and the hunger in my heart will be satisfied—if the Great Spirit wills it, as I think He does."

---

[1] I thank you.

He would not step indoors for food, but insisted on walking back toward the Broad-Way with Master Burnet and me. At the Bowling Green we encountered Peter Corlaer. His huge belly waggled before him with the energy of his pace, and he was quite out of breath.

"Ha, Peter," the governor hailed him. "Well met, indeed. What hath earned us this honor?"

"I heardt Ta-wan-ne-ars was here," he panted. "I followedt him down-rifer from Fort Orange."

"What does Corlaer wish?" asked Ta-wan-ne-ars.

The big Dutchman stammered and gurgled with embarrassment.

"I go with you," he gasped after much effort.

"But you know not whither I go," said Ta-wan-ne-ars.

"Wherefer you go. Idt does not matter."

"I go to the Land of Lost Souls."

"*Ja*, that's all righdt," returned Corlaer. "I go with you."

"Take him, Ta-wan-ne-ars," advised the governor. "'Tis a friend you may depend upon who will follow you a week's journey for the privilege of securing your assent to the risking of his life in your service."

THE hard lines of the Seneca's stern face were softened by a rare glow of feeling.

"Ta-wan-ne-ars never doubted Corlaer, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go," he answered, squeezing Peter's hand in his. "He would not ask any to go with him because the peril is great. But he will be glad to have Peter by his side. We will take the first boat which leaves."

"One is sailing from der Whale's Headt wharf," suggested Peter.

"Good. Then we will say good-by here."

"No, no, we will accompany you to the wharf," said the governor. "Where are you from, Peter?"

"I was in der Shawnees' country when I heardt Ta-wan-ne-ars was going upon a long journey alone. So I go to De-o-nun-da-ga-a, andt from there to Fort Orange andt here."

"Have you heard aught of Black Robe since the burning of La Vierge du Bois?"

"He was in der country of der Miamis this Spring, they saidt."

"And Murray?"

"*Nein*, Murray is nefer spoken of. Der French would hafe none of him. They saidt he sailed from Quebec for der Hafana."

"So are the mighty fallen," mused the governor as we strolled along. "A few short months ago he was more powerful than I in the province. Today he is nobody."

"Beg yer pardons, sirs," wheezed a voice behind us, "but the tapman at the Whale's Head Tavern yonder said as how one o' ye was Master Ormerod."

The speaker was a tarry, grizzled sailorman, with three fingers slashed off his left hand. He touched his cap knowingly, and ranged up beside us.

"I am Master Ormerod," I told him.

"Ah, yessir. Thanky, sir."

He eyed me keenly.

"It's the face and the figger, right enough. I'd ha' knowed you anywheres."

"Where have I seen you before?" I inquired with surprize.

"Never laid eyes on me, you ain't, sir—nor me on you," he returned promptly.

"What is it you want then?"

I reached into my pocket, thinking perhaps the man was a beggar. 'Twas my lucky day, I reflected, and 'twould be churlish to deny help to one in want.

"I won't be refusin' o' a pan o' rum like," he responded with a grin. "But my business was to give ye this."

And he produced from the inside of his jacket an oblong package wrapped in canvas.

"Here y'are, sir."

He thrust it into my grasp, fisted the shilling I offered him and made off at speed into a convenient alley. I called after him, but he only cast a look over his shoulder and took to his heels.

"Examine the package," said the governor. "'Tis a queer gift a man will not wait to see appraised."

Beneath the canvas was a wrapping of oiled silk, and within that one of heavy linen. As this fell away our eyes were blinded by a dazzling heap of red and white stones linked with bars of gold.

"A necklace of rubies and diamonds," opined Master Burnet. "Spoil of the Indies."

A slip of paper fluttered to the ground. I picked it up. The writing was in brown ink, faded by dampness, but fully legible—a bold, flowing script. It ran:

> From One who shal bee Namelesse, a Gentleman of goode Estate and Name, who is now Under a Cloude but will Yette recover fromme 'ye slings and Arrowes of Outrageous fortune.' Take this so Mistress Ormerod maye not bee Portionlesse. There is More where this came from.

"I'll wager there is," pronounced the governor. "Master Murray hath turned pirate. I would I had that tarry breeks who scurried hence, and we might screw some information from him. But New York town is a favorite haunt of his breed, and he will disappear without trouble."

"What shall I do with it?" I asked in bewilderment.

Ta-wan-ne-ars and Peter joined in the governor's hearty roar of amusement.

"Why, even accept it," quoth Master Burnet. "The villain has tricked you so you can do naught else. 'Tis an extraordinary rogue."

So I pocketed the gems, and we walked out upon the wharf where the sloop *River Queene* lay with her moorings slack.

"Tumble aboard, my masters," shouted the captain. "There's a fair breeze and the tide is ebbing."

"Good-by," said Ta-wan-ne-ars. "Ga-en-gwa-ra-go and O-te-ti-an-i will be always in the thoughts of Ta-wan-ne-ars."

"Goodt-by," mumbled Corlaer.

"Good-by for a while," retorted the governor. "We shall be ready to welcome you with rejoicing when you return with a brave tale to tell us."

"Good-by," I called, and my voice choked.

I raised my right arm in the Iroquois gesture of greeting and farewell. Ta-wan-ne-ars answered in kind, motionless as a bronze statute against the dirty gray expanse of the sail. The sloop dropped her moorings and glided out into the current.

In ten minutes Peter's face was a broad white blotch at the foot of the mast and Ta-wan-ne-ars was a darker blur beside him. They sailed on into the eye of the setting sun.

" 'Tis the very spirit of this land, Ormerod," observed Master Burnet as we watched. "Having finished one adventure, they seek a fresh trial of their resource and daring. Ah, well, 'tis for you and me to take their precept and strive to sharpen our wits upon some homely adventures of our own. All of us may not seek the Land of Lost Souls, but each of us may find a worth-while task upon his doorstep."

EPILOG

BOW down your heads, O my Readers! He-no, the Thunderer, and Ga-oh, the Old Man of the Winds, are filling the air with confusion. Our Council-Fire is dying. The smoke has drifted away. Ha-wen-ne-yu has shut his ears. The doors to Yesterday are closing.

We will dance the O-ke-wa, the Dance for the Dead, for what was has passed. It is no more. Only the memory of the wise and the brave remains. Not even the Falling Waters of Jagara can sweep away the names of To-do-da-ho and the Shining Ones of the Great League.

They have been honored by Ha-wen-ne-yu. They sit at his side in the Halls of Ho-no-che-no-keh. The Good Spirits laugh and chant their praises as they show the scalps they have taken and recount the tribes they conquered. The De-o-ha-ko, the Three Sisters, our Supporters, are their handmaidens. They flourish in the Hereafter like the Pine-Tree on earth.

Remember them, O my Readers! Remember the Founders! Remember the Long House they built! Remember the warriors of the Eight Clans!

For what you are you owe to them.

Na-ho!

THE END

This is our first month under the new three-times-a-month plan.

The next issue appears September 20th; the third on September 30th

SHATTERED ALTARS

by E. O. FOSTER

Author of "Privit Morey, the Pair o' Thim," "The Coconut Grenadiers," etc.

"'Auld harps' is like young soldiers—not to be picked upon by strangers."—*Old Spud.*

BUNDUK NANG KAO, its conical exterior covered with a defying tangle of sharp-edged *cogon* grass and poison-spiked *bejuco*, rose like a giant ink-bottle from the table-land skirting the southern shores of the Laguna de Bay. The silver of the rising moon threw into bold relief its velvety outline, broken only by the giant bamboo whose plumed head towered above its crest like an old-fashioned quill left standing in its horn by a careless scribe.

Since early noon, Private Peter Morey had been hewing and hacking his way from the rear of the guard-house toward its summit, rising a scant two hundred feet above the flagstaff on the headquarters of Major John T. Morphy, commanding at Los Banos, where the Second Battalion of the —teenth U. S. Infantry and the First Battalion of the Second Washington Volunteers had been stationed since that village had been captured by American troops. Tattoo was sounding as he won his way free from the jungle and stepped into the narrow border of short herbage which marked the mouth of the extinct mud volcano.

Directly opposite, the rounded cliff of a seismic upthrust hung poised in the shadows as if it were the bottle's lid awaiting the touch of an impatient finger to drop it clattering over the well of inky waters which lay pulsing in the crater below, silent as an insurgent plot, cruel as a priest of the Katipunan. There was a flicker of light on its face which grew larger and larger as the moon crept higher and higher up the ladder of the east, to thrust at last his rounded visage through an oblong fault in the apparently solid wall, his focused beams striking full at the foot of the swaying bamboo. Morey gazed in wonder at the beauty of the scene, drawing back quietly as the muffled tread of many feet marching in unison told of a subterranean passage beneath his feet. He had followed the clue found while on guard the day before to its logical conclusion and was now standing at the door of the house of the mysterious gods of the Katipunan.

There was a subdued scuffling of feet as of spectators taking their places at an execution, a moment of quiet broken by a tiny wail, plaintive as from a pygmy's flute. Morey dropped prone on the grassy border and worked forward, inch by inch, until he was able to peer downward into the gloom. The shaft of the moon dropped lower and lower, limning faintly the outlines of a bamboo scaffolding hugging the walls below, its broad platform, packed with white-robed, white-hooded figures, jutting over the black bowl like the balcony of a theater. Over the scene the shadows moved and flitted mysteriously.

The rhythmic tap of a drum began to punctuate the flute's sad notes as the moon with one swift stroke swept full through the rising mists and lifted the grayish pall of night from the dancing priests of the Katipunan, making ready for their annual sacrifice on the platform below. The high priest of the order, swinging aloft the living emblem of the House of the Snake, set the *tempo*, and the spidery structure began to sway and creak as his priests, tracing serpentine emblems, practised softly a new hymn of hate—and death:

Masama Americano
Ay yoco say yo;
Masama Americano
Katipunan patay co.

Morey lay quiet as a cat watching the rites until the descending shaft of light targeted the spot where the substitute sacrifice, suspended in front of the platform, squealed, and squealing, died as it swayed slowly in the soft moonlight. Then he slipped over the crater's edge and followed at a safe distance the path of the retreating priests through the passage below. It was early morning before he slipped from the altar door of the old church on the outskirts of the town and stole through the deserted streets to his cot in the basement of the commanding officer's headquarters.

* * *

"OLD SPUD," as Major Morphy was lovingly called by the men of the —teenth, also had passed a strenuous night. The day before the river gunboat *Napindan* had carried him and the other commanding officers of the Laguna region to Manila for a special conference at General Headquarters.

General Otis, pricked on one side by the insistence of the civil government that the natives should be treated like "little brown brothers," and on the other by the reports from the Intelligence section that the evil serpent of Katipunanism was again spreading its slimy trail over the islands, was in no gentle mood as he laid down the law to his subordinates.

"Gentlemen, there is reason to believe that the Priests of the Katipunan are going to offer a human sacrifice to their abominable god this month." The general was most serious as he continued.

"Ever since its inception, hundreds of years ago, this order has held its sacrificial rites in a spot unknown outside the order, in the Laguna de Bay region. Its chief priest is supposed to be Juan de Jesus, now a prisoner at Los Banos. You will use every endeavor to locate the gathering place, and, if necessary, use sufficient force to prevent the offering of a human sacrifice. Otherwise, the workings of the order are not to be interfered with."

There was a knock at the door, and an orderly, bearing a telegram, stepped into the room, saluted, and handed the folded flimsy to the major.

The general chuckled quietly to himself as he saw the tide of color sweeping in ever-reddening waves up the major's tanned cheeks. He always liked to get a joke on his one-time sergeant.

"Come, major, come. Read it to all of us."

"It's—it's—it's from me bye, sir, Lieutenant Lawrence Morphy. It says that Juan de Jesus has escaped, and it's—it's-s—signed by him as—as Officer of the Day."

A quiet look passed from officer to officer, and the general and the major were left alone. A few minutes later the two stood at the gate of the Palace, the general wishing his old comrade "a quick run to the end of the trail and good luck along the way."

The major hurried to the office of the Captain of the Port, told his story, and was soon aboard a navy launch, headed for the Laguna. Just at the big turn in the Pasig, near the English Club, the launch had the misfortune to get stuck on the shifting shoal in the big eddy which made this point the cursing spot of all river pilots. The major fumed and fretted, but the bugler of the guard was sounding the first notes of reveille before the launch drew alongside the dock at Los Banos.

"Turn out the guard for the commanding officer!"

The sentry on Post No. 1 knew his business. His bellow would have wakened the dead.

"Niver moind the gyard!" The major was heading for his quarters under full steam. He hardly noticed the sentry's salute.

"Never mind the guard!" and, *sotto voce*, "The main guy says 'nit' "! came from the sentry as he shouldered his Krag and began to "walk his post in a military manner, keeping constantly on the alert, etc.," as laid down in the blue bible of the soldier, Army Regulations.

"Assembly" sounded, followed by "mess call," and the old veteran stood at his window, peering into the morning fog, anxiously awaiting the report of the Officer of the Day.

It was a proud old father that had viewed guard-mount the day of his departure, and it was a sad old soldier that saw the end of his youngster's first tour of duty approaching. There would be an investigation, one that he would have to order, and the board might feel that it would be for the interest of the service that the lieutenant should face a court-martial.

The slap, slap, slap of rifles falling to an order as the guard and prisoners were inspected, came from the small square below. Soon there was a clicking of heels and the sergeant of the guard turned the corner into the line of the major's vision.

"Sargint, sargint, and are ye comin' here to report the gyard! 'Tis ye thot know better! Give my complimints to the Officer of the Day and till him to come here at wanst!" The old boy was angry. He would show the lieutenant a thing or two. "Sargint, did ye hear me? Ye did? Will, thin, why don't ye obey ordhers!"

The sergeant continued his steady walk toward the major, seemingly paying no attention to his command.

"Sargint, sargint!"

The offending non-com. was now within easy speaking distance. He stopped, stood at attention, and saluted.

"If the major pleases——"

"The Major don't please, nor ye don't please the Major, neither. Whot in the —— do ye mean a-comin' here whin I tell ye to do somethin' ilse. Git a hump on ye now——"

The sergeant stood firm as a rock at salute.

"Standin' at salute is it? Waitin' for me to return it? Will, stand there a while. Yer arm'll git tired or I'll pull yer belt before I'll answer the salute of an— Shut up now, I say, not a worrud out of ye! Whot's thot ye say? The lieutenant is not at the guard-house? He's not? He is! Ye know he is! And he's not in his quarters? He is, I tell ye, he is!! Don't think just because he's Old Spud's son thot he's as crazy as his fayther. Git a hump on ye now and till that limb o' Sat——"

The major remembered just in time. He was not a West Pointer, but he was well versed in army courtesy, a knowledge gained from hard knocks when he was a "second louey" fresh from the ranks. He came to attention, gave the sergeant of the guard a salute as stiff and as formal as he would have rendered the Adjutant-General of the Army. The sergeant saluted again, made an "about face," and started for the guard-house.

THE major watched him out of sight, and then fairly jumped into his uniform, and clattered down the stairs. He'd show Lieutenant Morphy that he could not trifle with the commanding officer at Los Banos, even if that officer did happen to be his father.

There was an uneasy creaking in the corner, and Private Peter Morey, fully dressed, stood sleepily on his feet, trying to come to attention. He looked sloppy, his eyes were red. It was enough to loose the wire edge of the major's wrath.

"Phwat in the ——! Git yer ugly mouth shut and yer squinty eyes opin, at wanst now, at wanst! Thin jist but'n up that shirt o' yours and chase yersilf down to the quarthers o' Lieutenant Morphy and till him to report here immejutly!"

"The lieutenant is not in his quarters, sir," Morey had "snapped out of it" and was very much alive. "I have been waiting——"

"Yis, yis, ye've bin waitin', all right, and me a walkin' the floor above to the tune o' yer most beautiful snorin' the last half-hour. Come, man, out wid it! Don't stand pickin' the water out o' yer teeth wid yer finger-nails! Till me where the lieutenant is, or I'll show ye and I'll show him too. 'Tis triplets I have to trouble my days now, and not jist ye and Private Morey, second, the pair o' ye. Where is he, I ask ye, where is he?"

"Lieutenant Morphy, sir, is in the hands of Juan de Jesus, and his band of Katipunan cutthroats. If the major will permit I would suggest that he allow me to call the adjutant and let him hear the exact situation so far as I know it. There may yet be time to save the lieutenant!"

"Time to save the lieutenant? And why fore not save him at wanst? D'ye mean to till me thot I can't take the min o' this post and clean up ivery —— insurrecto in these islands?"

"But, major, the lieutenant is a prisoner.

Day before yesterday, while on guard, I intercepted a note intended for old Juan written in Tagalog. It contained the words "Iglesa" and "Bunduk nang Kao," connected by a crudely drawn serpent. When old Juan escaped as the guard was being changed yesterday I showed the note to Lieutenant Morphy and he gave me permission to cut my way to the top of the Bunduk. He evidently was trapped by Juan in the church last night, where the wily old devil had taken refuge after his escape, killing the Spanish *padre* and taking his place at the altar."

"How do ye know he was trapped?" The major's excitement was increasing.

Morey hesitated a minute, then stepped to his cot and drew forth the belt and side arms of the missing officer of the day, handing them to the major. They were bloodstained.

"I found these beside the body of the old priest when I came through the church early this morning, sir."

The major bent his head over the belt to hide his agony.

"Yis, yis, go on me bye."

"When I arrived at the end of the path I cut yesterday I was just in time to witness a rehearsal that made my blood run cold. The priests of the Katipunan are preparing to offer a human sacrifice at their conclave and the lieutenant, their intended offering, is now swaying from the roof of an underground bowl hollowed from the solid lava, his heels just out of reach of the biggest snake I ever saw. She's coiled like a cone around her eggs and hopping mad. The floor of the bowl is covered with a slimy mass of her progeny of different ages, none large enough to raise themselves over the edge of their prison."

"The major will understand why it is necessary to use caution when I tell him that I worked part way around the bowl by the light of an air hole that must break the surface somewhere near headquarters, only to discover old Juan and that Jamaica nigger wife of his squatted at the end of the rope where it was drawn back from the pulley overhead ready to chop it at the first sign of an attack and let the lieutenant fall into that mess of writhing horrors."

"Howly sufferin' cats! 'Tis a fix they've got poor Larry in, but I'll till ye this, thot if Juan de Jesus, the auld ——, as much as harms a hair o' me bye's hid, I'll feed him snakes, big wans, till he'll wisht he was a roastin' in —— before he iver was bor-rn! —— him, the curse o' ——"

The major checked his rising voice suddenly. He was in a tight corner, and that bit of cunning that lies latent in every son of the Emerald Isle till called forth by deep distress, warned him to step softly lest he further endanger his son's life. The old boy was as cool as ice as he thanked Morey and told him to call the adjutant.

Following the conference there was a quiet shifting of the guard lines to enclose the old church on the outskirts of the town, and the post settled down to its usual routine.

THE Moreys, Peter and his twin, Ray, asked for and obtained a pass to visit Manila, leaving immediately after breakfast and returning early in the afternoon when all of the native population had settled down for their siesta. They did not report at headquarters but hurried to the guard-house, carrying a small black box and a haversack packed to its utmost dimension. A few minutes later they made their way stealthily up the path cut the night before and soon were busy as cats in a strange garret on and around the scaffolding.

As dusk fell Peter shinned half way up the big bamboo, affixed a small block pulley and rove through it a half-inch manila rope, letting both ends drop to the ground, where his brother tied them to the foot of the tree. The small box was set firmly in place a short distance away and covered carelessly with a wisp of *cogon* grass. Then they worked their way down to the guard-house and supper.

All that day the major sat at his desk, staring out at Bunduk nang Kao. From time to time his lips moved quietly as if in prayer, and an occasional soft click told of the hands nervously telling over the beads of his rosary. Larry, his only son, his only close relative left, was in danger, and a danger that only cunning could circumvent.

That was the hardest thing of all—to sit quietly waiting, watching, while somewhere within a stone's throw, his son was swinging to and fro, as that arch-enemy of all Americans, Juan de Jesus, and his negress wife, gently pulled the rope that held him just out of reach of the menacing jaws of a gigantic rock python.

When, at first call for retreat, the guard lines were drawn back to their original position, the call for vespers sounded from the old church. Within a few minutes the native population drifted *en masse* through its portals, and at nine o'clock, when tattoo sounded and the garrison had apparently settled down to slumber, the lights above altar and nave flickered out one by one.

A solemn hush fell over the temple of God, which, for the moment, had been given over to the hosts of the devil. A few women and children might have been seen wending their way homeward under the light of the rising moon, and that was all. Again the guard lines were extended, and a special patrol marched from the quarters of one of the National Guard companies to take post around the apparently deserted place of worship.

The major and his adjutant left headquarters shortly afterward, walking briskly to the guard-house, followed by the two Moreys, Big Jake, the corral boss, and twenty picked men, ten of whom wore on their breasts the crosses that told of their prowess at the targets. They made their way up the trail to the top of Bunduk nang Kao.

There was a whispered order and the detachment took their places near the big bamboo. Big Jake fastened a lariat to one end of the rope hanging from the pulley above, and passed the other end back to the ten men who had stacked their arms a moment before. The sharpshooters took their places, lying prone at the crater's edge, the muzzles of their rifles being hidden in the grass.

The major, the company shot-gun nestled lovingly in the hollow of his arm, stood watchful in the shadows thrown by the young bamboo shoots, springing from the parent tree. Kneeling at his side, the brass keys on the black box within tapping distance of his nervous fingers, the adjutant waited as if for a word of command. The Moreys knelt behind the major, ready to transmit his whispered orders if occasion made necessary any change in plans.

There was an uneasy scuffling on the platform below. The stage was set. The High Priest and his satellites were ready for their mummery. They felt safe from attack, the tunnel from the church to the crater being guarded by bolo-men; and the matted sides of the mountain had turned aside both native and Spaniard for years. They did not dream that the "gallery gods" on the crater's brink were ready to take advantage of the slightest break in their lines.

As if at a prompter's command, the flute began its sobbing wail. The single tap of a drum, and silence fell, deep as the pits of death. The watchers above stood as if carved from onyx, their outlines blending in the wavering shadows cast by the mists ever rising from the pool below. Again the flute, sweet as the whisper of Lethe, and the priests took up the strain, chanting as one:

"Dahun Kao, Katipunan,
Dahun Kao,
Dahun Kao;
Halikarao Katipunan,
Halikarao,
Halikarao."

FROM the deep shadows on the other side of the pool, tiny points of foam which lengthened into broadening arrows, marked the advent of the herd of crocodiles that had made their home in the confines of the crater since their first parent stock had been entrapped in a volcanic upheaval hundreds of years before.

The drum and the flute took up a livelier strain which grew louder and louder with each beat of the high priest's snake-encircled wrist. A bugle now added its note. The noise of the singing drowned the swishing and bellowing of the crocodile herd below. Again a moment's hush, followed by a clatter of tiny hoofs, and a young pig stepped mincingly from the mouth of the tunnel, champing its jaws as it devoured the trail of tiny yams which had drawn it along the unknown path.

The bugle ceased its call, the drum its beating, and as each succeeding step drew the porcine explorer nearer the brink of the platform, the wailing of the flute grew softer and softer, dying like a tired child's cry as it sobs itself to sleep.

It stood at the end of the trail, its inquiring snout thrust into the darkness where hung a tempting yam just out of reach. Below, the hungry crocodiles thrust their yawning muzzles upward, as if in anticipation of the moment, when, driven by its own gluttony, the little porker would make that extra step forward which would land him in the jaws of the most fortunate.

There was a sudden movement, followed by the death squeal, as the pig, caught in a noose thrown by an under-priest, was disembowled by one quick stroke of his glistening bolo.

A sudden rush turned the oily surface of the waters below into a churning whirlpool of quicksilver as the alligators began their fight for the entrails, the king of the herd throwing his ugly body two-thirds out of the water in a vain endeavor to catch the carcass swinging to and fro just above his reach. Again the chant of death began, telling of the human sacrifice that would follow when the full moon threw its shadow exactly below the first offering:

"Dahun Kao,
Halekirito,
Dahun Kao,
Halekirito,
Americano,
Patay, patay!"

The call of the priests rose higher and higher, bursting into a frenzied pæan of delight as the living, breathing god of their idolatry, Dahun Kao, a gigantic Rock Python, drew his forty feet of sinuousness around the pool like a flickering light, and began raising slowly upward toward the platform.

From the post came the first note of taps—and from the tunnel came the voice of a woman, chanting the altar hymn of the Serpent God. On the platform below, the hooded priests slowly formed a lane, that the rays of the moon might fall full upon the high priestess of the order, leading as if in chains, her sacrifice.

Again a moment's hush, and the melodic notes of taps, rising from the camp below, told the sleepy soldiers to——

Go to sleep,
Go to sleep,
Go to sleep,
Your day's done,
Your day's done,
Rest, good night.

The first round of the bugle-call was finished before the priestess stepped upon the platform. Quietness followed, so deep that the gasping breathing of the sacrifice was plainly audible to the watchers on the brink of the pool above.

"God save him!"

The major had recognized his son. He shook as with the palsy. The gun lay unnoticed, unthought of, in his arm, as he watched the young officer follow the priestess step by step toward the end of the platform.

"Drugged and led to death like a swine, by a Jamaica negress! Better a bullet from the hands of the old man thot loves him than a dith like thot!"

The shaft of the moon dropped lower and lower. It struck fair on the coiling serpent and was broken into a thousand coruscating jets of light by his glistening scales. Ever his ugly head worked upward, waiting, watching for that sacrifice which his votaries offered each year when the moon lit his altar.

Again the distant bugle, and this time its refrain was taken up by the wailing flute and bugle, the drum beating its steady measure as step by step the priestess circled her victim until he stood facing her, his back to the pool where gigantic snake and ugly saurian waited for the end of the horrible rite.

Say Good-by,
Say Good-by,
Say Good-by,
Your hour's come,
Your hour's come,
Sleep in Death.

As the last note fell, the high priest raised the sacrificial knife.

THERE was a spurt of flame from the major's weapon, a hissing swish as Big Jake's lariat cut over the heads of the priests to encircle the lieutenant's body. The high priest swayed and fell, his glazing eyes fixed on the form of his intended sacrifice as the lieutenant was drawn steadily upward. The high priestess, the Jamaica negress, swooped on the knife that had fallen from his nerveless fingers and began jumping in vain endeavor to wreak her vengeance on the swaying figure.

There was a scampering in the tunnel below as of rats deserting a sinking ship, and only the dancing priests and the twining serpent were left at the altar. The priestess drew back the glittering knife as if to throw, there was a crash of rifles from above, and Kao's head disappeared as if by magic.

A ripple of tiny explosions followed the pressure of the adjutant's eager fingers on the keys of the small black box, and the scaffolding, torn out at its foundations by the powder charges set by the Moreys earlier in the day, crumpled—the platfrom with its living and dead sliding forward into the waters of the pool where the body of the serpent god writhed in agony and the crocodile horde began champing into shapeless masses the sacrifices of the gods of the gallery.

The giant bamboo bent lower its feathery head, to snap suddenly back into place as Lieutenant Morphy was landed safe and sound beside his father. For a moment the detachment watched the bedraggled survivors frantically scale the ragged timbers of the shattered altars of the Katipunan and disappear into the depths of the tunnel. The last to enter was the Jamaica negress, still waving the glistening knife.

A whispered command from the adjutant and the detachment worked its way slowly back to camp, Young Spud treading closely on the heels of the rear man. They joined the patrol in time to catch the remnants of the Katipunan conclave hurrying from the tunnel's mouth (hidden inside the church) and to hold them herded until a thorough search of the underground passages could be made.

The major and the two Moreys had dropped to the mouth of the tunnel and were already working through it. They crept quietly to the rocky bowl where the big female python still sat coiled on her cone of eggs, immovable, unblinking, in the center of her progeny of many years. The Moreys still carried the black battery and there was enough powder and guncotton left in the satchel to finish the job. While the major and Peter Morey stood guard Ray set his petard.

By this time Young Spud, who had fully recovered from the effects of the drug, was working with a detachment from the church end of the tunnel. He had not noticed the absence of his father and the two Moreys and it came as a second shock when he heard his father's voice bellowing down the cavern:

"Git a hump on ye now, the pair o' yez, and don't be fussin' with thot —— contraption any longer." Came the major into view, and Peter Morey. In the joy of reunion, father and son walked quietly toward their quarters in the wee hours of the morning, unmindful of the fact that Ray Morey was not with his brother when the latter had saluted and said good night.

The rising sun was heralded as usual next morning, by Tommy Rice's bugle; for rain or shine, battle or peace, happiness or misery, Uncle Sam's soldiers go unceasingly through all the motions laid down by the Blue Book.

Already the major was up and on his way to headquarters. He had a report to get off. He'd stopped the sacrifice all right, but he'd hurt a few of the "little brown brothers" in doing it. It would take some explaining and he wanted to get at it.

The last note of the bugle was still teasing the ears of the sleepy privates, when an explosion that rocked the post to its foundations, jarred every one from their slumbers. The startled sentries, facing toward the center of disturbance, saw the smoke and caught the whistle of the falling pieces of lava as the bottom of the old deserted quarry just beyond headquarters settled over the surrounding landscape.

They saw pieces of what they thought was a cable hurtling through the air, and hundreds of shorter, smaller objects that writhed and twisted as the inhabitants of the python's bowl followed the shattered body of Kao's consort in upward flight, to descend and slowly coil and quiver till the evening sun dropped behind the distant hills.

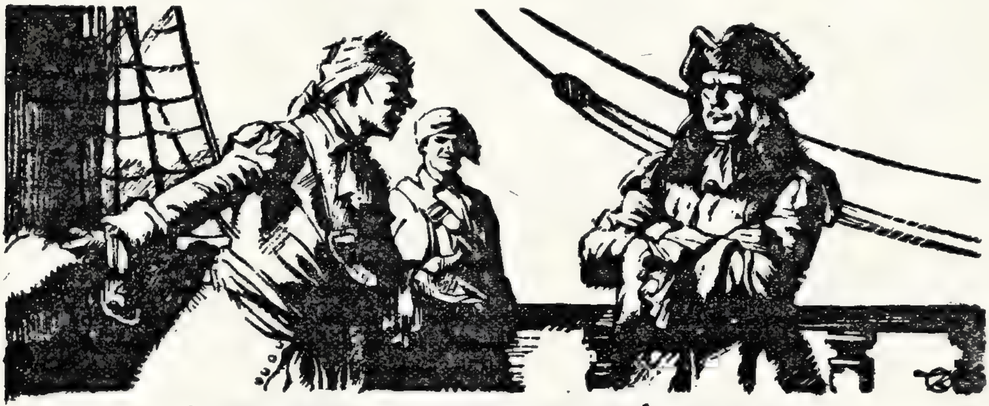
An hour later Ray Morey strolled nonchalantly up headquarters steps, a small black box held carefully under his arm. He knew *what* had caused the explosion and *who*, but he was asked no questions and vouchsafed no explanations. He was taking no chances.

"Mr. Miles, Mr. Miles!" The major, again "Old Spud," now that his boy was out of danger and with no threat of court-martial hanging over him, began his morning outburst. There was a rap at the door, and Private Ray Morey entered the room.

"Will, whot in —— are ye doin' here? 'Tis the adjutant I want, not the likes o' ye. Git out o' here—git out o' here quick, before I remember where I lift ye last night! Git a hump on ye now! Git-t I say!"

Private Morey, in his anxiety to flee the storm, attempted to salute and make an "about face" at the same time. The result was disastrous to himself and to the major's temper.

"There, there, me bye, as ye were. Don't be gittin' rattled just because ye was the cause of a beautiful young snake a-tyin' himsilf around me neck this marnin'! 'Tis lucky fer me—and fer ye—thot the —— thing had no head a' tall or I might not be able to put me Jawn Hancock to these bits o' parchmint thot'll make Private Morey, the pair o' thim, carporals. Did yez hear me say git out o' here? Will, I mint it. Git out—git out at wanst, and don't be fer tryin' to thank an auld fool of a fayther, or I'll pull them same stripes off before ye can sew 'em on, the pair o' ye."



THE HOSTAGE

A TALE OF THE BRETHREN OF THE MAIN

by Rafael Sabatini

Author of "Santa Maria," "Lord Julian's Mission," etc.

IN THE great harbor of Port Royal—spacious enough to have given moorings to all the ships of all the navies of the world—the *Colleen*, Peter Blood's great red-hulled ship, rode at anchor. Almost she had the air of a prisoner; for a quarter of a mile ahead to starboard rose the lofty, massive single round tower of the fort, whilst a couple of cables' length astern and to larboard rode the six men-of-war that composed the Jamaica squadron.

Abeam with her, across the harbor, were the flat-fronted white buildings of that imposing city coming down to the very water's edge.

Behind these the red roofs rose like terraces marking the gentle slope upon which the city stood, dominated here by a turret, there by a spire, and behind these again a range of green hills with, for ultimate background, a sky that was like a dome of polished steel. On a cane day-bed that had been set on the quarter-deck and sheltered from the dazzling, blistering sunshine by an improvized awning of brown sail-cloth lounged Peter Blood.

From immediately below him came the swish of mops and the gurgle of water in the scuppers, for it was still early morning and under the directions of the bo'sun the swabbers were at work in the waist and forecastle. And despite the heat one of the toilers found breath to croak a ribald buccaneering ditty:

For we laid her board and board
And we put her to the sword,
And we sank her in the deep blue sea.
So it's heigh-ho and heave-a-ho!
Who'll sail to the south with me?

Blood heaved a sigh and the ghost of a smile played over his keen, lean, sun-tanned face. Then the black brows came together over the vivid blue eyes and thought swiftly closed the door upon his immediate surroundings.

He was considering his queer destiny; and it seemed to him that the wheel of it had come full circle.

Transplanted to the plantations after Sedgemoor, as a rebel, he had been sold into slavery at Barbados to a wealthy, brutal planter named Bishop. Thence he had escaped to become in a short while the admiral of a buccaneering fleet that was the terror of Spain and the cause of perpetually strained relations between the courts of the Escurial and St. James's.

Despairing of subduing him by force, Lord Sunderland, the Secretary of State, set about seducing him from his allegiance to the Brotherhood of the Main by a commission in the King's service. It was a proposal that Blood would have scorned had not a curious set of circumstances entangled him in their net.

The ship bearing Lord Julian Wade—Lord Sunderland's envoy and kinsman—had fallen a victim to a Spanish privateer off Hispaniola, and Lord Julian had been taken prisoner together with Miss Arabella Bishop, who was returning from St. Nicholas to Jamaica, of which her uncle—the whilom Barbados planter—was now deputy-governor. From this captivity Blood had rescued them, and then, largely as a consequence, he had run into a half-squadron of the fleet from Port Royal commanded by Colonel Bishop himself, of whom Blood knew that in no circumstances could he expect quarter.

Thus, when Miss Bishop had urged him then to place himself under shelter of the commission of which Lord Julian was the bearer, he had succumbed—not from love of life, but because she who scorned him for what he he was become had pointed out that by loyal service he might find redemption.

And so it fell out that the exultation of his bitter enemy, Colonel Bishop, was dashed as it reached its zenith and his hand closed upon the buccaneer he had sworn to hang. Instead of going to the gallows here was Blood taking his ease in Port Royal waters, holding colonel's rank in the King's service, his fine ship a unit in the Jamaica squadron.

Presently when news of it reached the buccaneer fleet that vainly awaited him in Tortuga, his name that had stood so high among the Brethren of the Main would become a byword, a thing of execration, and before all was done his life might pay forfeit for what would be accounted a treacherous defection. And for what had he placed himself in this position? To redeem himself in the eyes of a slip of a girl who continued, notwithstanding, to regard him with aversion.

He had scarcely seen her since his coming to Port Royal a fortnight ago, and this although daily he had haunted the fort where her uncle resided, and daily braved the unmasked hostility and baffled rancor in which Colonel Bishop held him. It was the graceful elegant young trifler from St. James's, Lord Julian Wade, who absorbed her every moment. And what chance had Blood, a desperate adventurer with a record of outlawry, against such a rival as that, a man of parts, moreover, as he was bound to admit?

In the bitterness of his soul, he beheld himself to be as the dog in the fable that had dropped the substance to snatch a delusive shadow.

A boat that had approached unnoticed from the shore scraped and bumped alongside the *Colleen* and a raucous voice sent up a hailing shout. From the ship's belfry two silvery notes rang clear and sharp, and a moment or two later the bo'sun's whistle shrilled a long wail.

The sounds disturbed Colonel Blood from his disgruntled musings. He rose, a tall active man, very elegant in black and silver of a Spanish fashion, the long ringlets of his jet-black hair reaching to the collar of fine point that adorned his doublet. He advanced to the carved rail of the quarter-deck, just as Jerry Pitt, the master of the *Colleen*, set foot upon the companion. This active, shapely, golden-bearded Devonshire lad had been Blood's fellow-slave in Barbados and his closest friend in those three years of piracy that had followed their escape.

"A note for you from the deputy-governor," he said shortly, and proffered the folded sheet he carried.

Blood broke the seal and read swiftly. Pitt, loosely clad in shirt and breeches, leaned against the rail and watched him, unmistakable concern imprinted on his fair, frank countenance.

Blood uttered a short laugh and curled his lip.

"It is a very peremptory summons," he said, and passed the note to his friend.

Pitt's gray eyes skimmed it.

"You'll not go?" he said, between question and assertion.

"Why not? Haven't I been a daily visitor at the fort——"

"But it'll be about Wolverstone that he wants to see you. It gives him a real grievance at last. You know, Peter, that it is

Lord Julian alone who has stood between this rascal Bishop and his hate of you. If now he can show that ——"

"What if he can?" Blood interrupted carelessly. "Shall I be in greater danger there than here aboard, now that we've but fifty men left and they lukewarm rogues who would as soon serve the king as me? Jerry, dear lad, the *Colleen's* a prisoner here, bedad, 'twixt the fort there and the fleet yonder. Don't be forgetting that."

Jerry clenched his hands.

"Why did ye let Wolverstone and the others go?" he cried with a touch of bitterness.

"What else could I do in honesty?" And as Pitt did not answer him— "Ye see?" he said, and shrugged. "I'll be getting my hat and stick and sword, and go ashore in the cock-boat. See it manned for me."

"Ye're going to deliver yourself into Bishop's hands," cried Jerry.

"Well, well, maybe he'll not find me quite so easy to grasp as he imagines." And with a laugh, Blood departed to his cabin.

Jerry Pitt answered the laugh with an oath. A moment he stood irresolute where Blood had left him. Then slowly, reluctance dragging at his feet, he went down the companion to give the order for the cock-boat.

"If anything should happen to you, Peter," he said as Blood was going over the side, "Colonel Bishop had better look to himself. These fifty lads may be lukewarm at present, as you say, but—sink me!—they'll be anything but lukewarm then."

"And what should be happening to me, Jerry? Sure now, I'll be back for dinner, so I will." Blood climbed down into the waiting boat. But laugh though he might, he knew as well as Jerry that in going ashore that morning he carried his life in his hands. Because of this it may have been that when he stepped on to the narrow mole in the shadow of the shallow outer wall of the fort through whose crenels were thrust the black noses of its heavy guns, he gave order that the boat should stay for him at that spot. He realized that he might have to retreat in a hurry.

WALKING leisurely he skirted the embattled wall and passed through the great gates into the courtyard at the rear of the fort. Half a dozen soldiers lounged there, and in the shadow cast by the wall the commandant himself was slowly pacing. He stopped short at sight of Colonel Blood and saluted him, as was due, but the smile that lifted the officer's stiff mustachios was grimly sardonic.

Colonel Blood's attention, however, was elsewhere. On his right stretched a spacious garden beyond which rose the white house that was the residence of the deputy-governor. In that garden's main avenue that was fringed with palm and sandalwood he had caught a glimpse of Miss Bishop sauntering alone. He crossed the courtyard with suddenly lengthened stride.

"Good morning to ye, ma'am," was his greeting as he overtook her; and, hat in hand now, he added on a note of protest—"Sure it's nothing less than uncharitable to make me run in this heat."

"Then why run?" she asked him coolly, standing very slim and straight before him, all in white and very maidenly save in her almost unnatural composure. "I am pressed," she added. "So you will forgive me if I do not stay."

"You were none so pressed until I came," said he, and if his lips smiled, his blue eyes were oddly hard.

"Since you perceive it, sir, I wonder that you trouble to be so insistent."

"Because the reason for it escapes me. And I'm by nature inquisitive."

Her breathing unhurried, her clear hazel eyes quite steadily considering him, she answered:

"I should have thought that I had made the reason clear."

"Meaning, now, that I am a thief and a pirate?"

She shrugged and turned aside.

"I desired to avoid repeating words that seemed to offend you," she said coolly.

"So that ye can be charitable in some ways." He laughed softly. "Glory be, now, I should be thankful for so much. Yet I can't forget that when I was no better than a slave in your uncle's household in Barbados ye used me with a certain kindness."

"You were different then. You had been transported for rebellion. But that was your only offence, and it is possible to respect a rebel. You were just an unfortunate gentleman."

"And what else would ye be calling me now?"

"Hardly unfortunate. We have heard of

your good fortune on the seas—how your luck has passed into a byword. And we have heard other things."

"Ay—a deal of lies, devil a doubt, as I could prove to you."

"I can not think why you should trouble to put yourself on your defense," said she discouragingly.

"So that ye may think less badly of me than ye do."

"What I think of you is a very little matter, sir."

"Can ye say that, now? Can ye say that, knowing as ye must that it was on that very account I was persuaded to accept this cursed commission in a service I despise? Didn't ye urge me with the plea that thus I might redeem the past? It's little enough I was concerned to redeem the past save only in your eyes. In my own I've done nothing at all that I'm ashamed of, considering the provocation I received."

Her glance faltered and fell away before his own that was so intent.

"I—I can't think why you should speak to me like this," she said with less than her earlier assurance.

"Ah now, can't ye indeed?" he cried. "Sure then I'll be telling ye."

"Oh, please! I beg that you will not." There was real alarm in her voice. But he never heeded it.

"Ye'll remember that day, a fortnight since, when the three ships of the Jamaica fleet bore down upon me. What was it, d'ye suppose, that made me afraid to fight? As ye heard Wolverstone say, I'd faced heavier odds and come out victorious. Ye may also have heard him say that it was having you aboard that made a coward of me. And that was the truth, so it was. I couldn't bear to think of the harm that might come to you in the terrible fight there'd have been if I engaged them."

"I—I realized that; and I am very grateful. I shall always be grateful."

"Maybe, but if it's also your intention always to think of me as a thief and a pirate, faith ye may keep your gratitude for all the good it's like to do me."

A livelier color crept into her cheeks.

"You misunderstand," she said. "It isn't that."

"What is it then?" quoth he, and added the question: "Lord Julian?"

She started, and stared at him blankly indignant.

"Och, be frank with me," he urged her. "'Twill be a kindness. So it will."

"You—you are quite insufferable," she said, her chin in the air. "I beg that you will let me pass."

He stepped aside and with the broad feathered hat which he still held in his hand he waved her on towards the house.

"I'll not be detaining you any longer, ma'am."

She moved to depart, then checked and faced him again. There was now a perceptible heave of the slight breast that faintly swelled the light bodice of gray silk.

"That day three years ago," she said, "when Don Diego Valdez raided Bridgetown, I saw things that I shall remember with horror to my dying hour, and I heard tell afterwards of others even more unspeakable. When I think of that what Valdez and his raiders did in Barbados then, you and your buccaneers have since been doing in a score of Spanish settlements, do you wonder that I—that I—desire as little as may be of your company whilst your new duties keep you in Port Royal?"

Nor was that all she said. Having been driven, as she felt, to explain herself, she went almost to the very limits of candor.

"Perhaps because in the old days I honored you for an unfortunate gentleman, pitied you for your misfortune, and esteemed you for the gifts you revealed and the fortitude with which you bore adversity, I am now the more readily moved to horror by the thought of what you have become."

Thus did she deal him, relentlessly, a death-wound to all his hopes. In what she said she afforded him reason enough for her aloofness; but his mounting jealousy preferred a reason other than the one she offered. Indeed, because she offered it so fully, he accounted it no reason at all, but just a pretext.

"Oh, madam!" he cried, and there was mockery in the crisp voice. "*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.* Ye'll know French, no doubt."

"I must know more than French to be able to guess your meaning. But it doesn't really matter. The Peter Blood I once knew in Barbados, and esteemed, is dead, sir."

"I am thinking that's the truth," he answered her, his bitterness increasing. "For it was yourself that killed him." And in answer to her gasp and sudden stare of mingled scorn and amazement he explained himself:

"You killed him on that day when ye tempted him to take a commission that made him a renegade and false to those who trusted him.

"With all the sins he has committed and all those that your imagination adds to them, at least he could boast until that day that he had never broken faith with any man. Because he saw that ye scorned him for a pirate, and because falsely ye represented that in this way he might redeem himself, he succumbed. And for what? To be told now what you have just told me—that though I redeem myself in the eyes of the world and of the law, in your eyes I remain a thief and a pirate, contemptible and to be shunned.

"Was not that to practise a deceit upon me? Will ye pretend that ye lacked the wit to see that it was redemption in your eyes alone that concerned me? What is the world and the law to me? I have shown—" He broke off. "Oh, but there! I've said enough, and perhaps more than enough; for after all, maybe, the cursed thing ye made me do for nothing can be undone. Good day to you, ma'am."

He turned and putting on his hat with a certain abrupt fierceness he strode away towards the house without waiting for an answer.

A negro slave conducted him to the wide piazza on the other side of the house in whose shade Colonel Bishop and my Lord Julian Wade took what little air there was.

They contrasted oddly, those two: the deputy-governor elderly, big, and corpulent, with a coarse, mahogany-colored face; Lord Julian young, tall, and elegant, with a high-bred countenance and a slow musical voice.

Colonel Bishop hailed his visitor with a series of grunts of vague but apparently ill-humored import. He did not trouble to rise, not even when his lordship, obeying the instincts of finer breeding, set him the example. From under scowling brows the wealthy Barbados planter considered this Colonel Blood who once had been his slave, whilst, hat in hand leaning lightly upon his long beribboned cane Colonel Blood waited, revealing nothing in his countenance of the anger seething within him, which was being steadily nourished by this cavalier reception.

At last, with scowling brow and in self-sufficient tones, Colonel Bishop delivered himself.

"I have sent for you, Colonel Blood, because of certain news that has just reached me. I am informed that yesterday evening a frigate left the harbor having on board your associate Wolverstone and a hundred men of the hundred and fifty that were serving under you. His lordship and I shall be glad to have your explanation of how you came to permit that departure."

"Permit?" quoth Blood. "I ordered it."

The answer left Bishop speechless for a moment. Then:

"You ordered it?" he said in accents of unbelief whilst Lord Julian raised his eyebrows. " 'Swounds! Perhaps you'll explain yourself. Whither has Wolverstone gone?"

"To Tortuga. He's gone with a message to the officers commanding the other four ships of the fleet that is awaiting me there, telling them what's happened and why they are no longer to expect me."

Bishop's great face seemed to swell and its high color to deepen.

"You hear that, my lord?" he cried. "Deliberately he has let Wolverstone loose upon the seas again—Wolverstone, the worst of all that gang of pirates after himself. I hope your lordship begins to perceive the mistake you made in granting the King's commission to such a man as this against all my counsels. Why this thing is—it's just mutiny—treason! By ——! It's matter for a court-martial."

"Och, cease your blather of mutiny and treason and courts-martial." Blood put on his hat, and sat down unbidden. "I have sent Wolverstone to inform Hagthorpe and Christian and Yberville and the rest of my lads that they've one clear month to follow my example, quit piracy and get back to their *boucans* or their logwood, or else clear out of Caribbean seas. That's what I've done."

"But the men?" his lordship interposed in his level cultured voice. "This hundred men that Wolverstone has taken with him?"

"They are those of my crew who had no taste for the King's service and have preferred to seek work of other kinds. It was in our compact, my lord, that there should be no constraining of my men."

"I don't remember it," said his lordship.

"Perhaps it wasn't explicity stated. But ye couldn't have supposed that I'd be consenting to anything different."

And then the deputy-governor exploded.

"You have given those —— rascals in Tortuga this warning so that they may escape! That is what you have done. That is how you abuse the commission that has saved your own neck!"

Colonel Blood considered him for a moment out of a face that was as impassive as a mask.

"The object in view," said he then, "was—leaving out of account your own appetites, which, as every one knows are just those of a hangman—to clear the Caribbean of buccaneers. Sure now, I've taken the most effective way of attaining that object. The knowledge that I've entered the King's service should in itself go far toward disbanding the fleet of which I was until lately a leader."

"Ah!" sneered the deputy-governor malevolently. "And if it does not?"

"It will be time enough then to consider what to do."

Lord Julian forestalled a fresh outburst on the part of Bishop.

"It is possible," he said, "that my Lord Sunderland will be satisfied provided that the solution is such as you promise."

It was a courteous conciliatory speech urged by friendliness toward Blood and understanding of the difficult position in which the buccaneer had found himself. His lordship was disposed to take his stand upon the letter of his instructions. Therefore he now held out a friendly hand to help him over the latest and most difficult obstacle which Blood himself had enabled Bishop to place in the way of his redemption.

Unfortunately the last person from whom Peter Blood desired assistance at that moment was this young nobleman in whom he beheld a successful rival.

"Anyway," he answered, with a suggestion of defiance and more than a suggestion of a sneer, "it's the most ye should expect from me and certainly the most ye'll get."

His lordship frowned.

"I don't think that I quite like the way ye put it. Blister me if I do, Colonel Blood."

"I am sorry for that, so I am," said Blood, impudently. "But there it is. I'm not on that account concerned to modify it."

His lordship's eyes seemed to open a little wider. They were gray eyes, clear, honest and fearless.

"Ah!" he said. "You're a prodigiously uncivil fellow. You disappoint me, Colonel Blood. I had formed the notion that you might be a gentleman."

"And that's not your lordship's only mistake," Bishop put in. "You made a worse when by a commission you sheltered this rascal from the gallows I had prepared for him in Port Royal."

"Aye—but the worst mistake of all in this matter of commissions," said Blood to his lordship, "was the one that made this greasy slaver deputy-governor of Jamaica instead of its hangman, which is the office for which he's by nature fitted."

"Colonel Blood!" cried his lordship in sharp protest. "Upon my soul and honor, sir, you go much too far. You are ——"

But here Bishop interrupted him. He had heaved himself to his feet at last and was venting his fury in unprintable abuse. Colonel Blood who had also risen stood apparently impassive for the storm to spend itself. When at last this happened, he addressed himself quietly to Lord Julian as if Colonel Bishop had not spoken.

"Your lordship was about to say?" he asked with challenging smoothness.

But his lordship had by now recovered his habitual composure and was again disposed to be conciliatory. He laughed and shrugged.

"Faith! Here's a deal of unnecessary heat," said he. "And God knows this accursed climate provides enough of that. Perhaps, Colonel Bishop, you are a little uncompromising; and you, sir, are certainly a deal too peppery. I have said, speaking on behalf of my Lord Sunderland, that I am content to await the result of your experiment."

But Bishop's fury had by now reached a stage in which it was not to be restrained.

"Are you indeed?" he roared. "Well, then, I am not. This is a matter in which your lordship must allow me to be the better judge. And anyhow I'll take the risk of acting on my own responsibility."

Lord Julian abandoned the struggle. He smiled wearily, shrugged, and waved a hand in implied resignation. The deputy-governor stormed on.

"SINCE my lord here has made you a colonel, I can't regularly deal with you out of hand for piracy as you deserve. But you shall answer before a court-martial for your action in the matter of Wolverstone, and take the consequence."

"I see," said Blood. "And it's yourself as deputy-governor will preside over that court-martial. So that ye can wipe off old scores by hanging me it's little ye care how ye do it!" He laughed and added: "*Præmonitus, præmunitus.*"

"What shall that mean?" quoth Lord Julian sharply.

"I had imagined that your lordship would have had some education."

He was at pains, it seemed, to be provocative.

"It's not the literal meaning I am asking, sir," said Lord Julian, with frosty dignity. "I want to know what you desire us to understand?"

"I'll leave your lordship guessing," said Blood. "And I'll be wishing ye both a very good day." He swept off his feathered hat, and made them a leg very elegantly.

"Before you go," said Bishop, " and to save you from any idle rashness, I'll tell you that the harbor-master and the commandant have their orders. You don't leave Port Royal, my fine gallows' bird. ——, you'll find permanent moorings here in Execution Dock."

Colonel Blood stiffened, and his vivid blue eyes stabbed the bloated face of his rancorous enemy. He passed his long cane into his left hand, and with his right thrust negligently into the breast of his doublet, he swung to Lord Julian, who was thoughtfully frowning.

"Your lordship, I think, promised me immunity from this."

"What I may have promised," said his lordship, "your own conduct makes it impossible to perform." He rose. "You did me a service, Colonel Blood, and I had hoped that we might be friends. But since you appear to prefer it otherwise—" He shrugged, and waved a hand toward the deputy-governor.

Blood surveyed him with undisguized hostility. He laughed unpleasantly.

"Ye mean that ye haven't the strength of character to resist the urgings of a bully. Well, well—as I said before—*præmonitus, præmunitus*. I'm afraid that ye're no scholar, Bishop, or ye'd know that it means forewarned, forearmed."

"Forewarned? Ha!" Bishop almost snarled. "The warning comes a little late. You do not leave this house." He took a step in the direction of the doorway, and raised his voice. "Ho there—" he was beginning to call.

Then with a sudden, audible catch in his breath, he stopped short. Colonel Blood's right hand had emerged from the breast of his doublet bringing with it a long pistol with silver mountings richly chased which he leveled at the deputy-governor's head.

"And forearmed," said he. "Don't stir from where you are, my lord, or there may be an accident."

And my lord, who had been moving to Bishop's assistance, stood instantly arrested. Chapfallen, with much of his high color suddenly departed, the deputy-governor was swaying on unsteady legs. Colonel Blood considered him with a grimness that increased his panic.

"I marvel that I don't pistol you without more ado, ye fat blackguard. If I don't it's for the same reason that once before I gave ye your life when it was forfeit.

"Ye're not aware of the reason, to be sure; but it may comfort ye to know that it exists. At the same time I'll warn ye not to put too heavy a strain on my generosity, which resides at the moment in my trigger-finger." He cast his cane from him, thus disengaging his left hand. "Be good enough to give me your arm, Colonel Bishop. Come, come, man, your arm."

Under the compulsion of that sharp tone, those vivid, resolute eyes and that gleaming pistol, Bishop obeyed without demur. His recent foul volubility was stemmed. He could not trust himself to speak. Colonel Blood tucked his left arm through the deputy-governor's proffered right. Then he thrust his own right hand with its pistol into the breast of his doublet.

"Though invisible, it's aiming at ye none the less, and I give you my word of honor that I'll shoot ye dead upon the very least provocation, whether that provocation is yours or another's. Ye'll bear that in mind, Lord Julian. And now, ye greasy hangman, step out as brisk and lively as ye can and behave as naturally as ye may, knowing that your life hangs on a thread."

In the courtyard of the fort the commandant, who had been instructed to hold himself in readiness with the necessary men against the need to effect the arrest of Colonel Blood, was amazed by the curious spectacle of the deputy-governor of Jamaica strolling forth arm-in-arm and apparently on the friendliest terms with the intended prisoner. For, as they went, Colonel Blood was chatting and laughing briskly.

They passed out of the gates unchallenged and so came to the mole where the cockboat from the *Colleen* was waiting. They took their places in the stern-sheets and were pulled away together, always very close and friendly, to the great red ship where Jerry Pitt so anxiously awaited news.

Great was his amazement to see the deputy-governor come toiling up the entrance ladder with Blood following very close behind him.

"Sure I walked into a trap, as ye feared, Jerry," Blood hailed him. "But I walked out again and fetched the trapper with me. He loves his life, does this fat coward."

Colonel Bishop stood in the waist, his great face blenched to the color of clay, his mouth loose, almost afraid to look at the fierce fellows lounging there, of whom he caught a glimpse out of the tail of his scared and bulging eyes. Blood shouted an order to the bo'sun who was leaning against the forecastle bulkhead.

"Throw me a rope with a running noose over the yard-arm there, against the need of it. Now don't be alarming yourself, colonel darling. It's no more than a provision against your being unreasonable, which I am sure ye'll not be. We'll talk the matter over whiles we are dining, for I trust ye'll not refuse to honor my table by your company."

He led away the will-less, cowed bully to the great cabin. A negro in white drawers and cotton shirt made haste by his command to serve dinner.

Colonel Bishop collapsed on a locker under the stern windows and spoke now for the first time.

"May I ask wha—what are your intentions?" he quavered.

"Why, nothing sinister, colonel. Although ye deserve nothing less than that same rope and yard-arm, I assure you that it's to be employed only as a last resource. Ye've said his lordship made a mistake when he handed me a commission which the Secretary of State did me the honor to design for me. I'm disposed to agree with you, and I think I'll be getting back to Tortuga and my buccaneers who at least are honest, decent fellows. So I've fetched ye aboard as a hostage."

"My —— !" groaned the deputy-governor. "Ye—ye never mean that ye'll carry me to Tortuga!"

Blood laughed outright.

"Oh, I'd never serve ye such a bad turn as that. No, no. All I want is that ye ensure my safe departure from Port Royal. Ye've given certain orders to your harbor-master and others to the commandant of that plaguey fort. Ye'll be so good as to send for them both aboard here, and inform them in my presence that the *Colleen* is leaving this afternoon on the King's service and is to pass out unmolested. And so as to make quite sure of their obedience, they shall go a little voyage with me themselves. Here's what you require. Now write—unless you prefer the yard-arm. I'll not be constraining you at all. Ye've a perfectly free choice."

The deputy-governor took the proffered pen and wrote in an unsteady hand that summons to his officers.

Blood dispatched it ashore and then bade his unwilling guest to table.

"I trust, colonel, your appetite is as stout as usual."

The wretched Bishop took the seat to which he was commanded. As for eating, however, that was not easy to a man in his position; nor did Blood press him. Blood himself fell to with a good appetite. But before he was midway through the meal came Jerry Pitt to inform him that Lord Julian Wade had just come aboard and was asking to see him instantly. Blood laughed.

"I was expecting him," said he. "Fetch him in."

Lord Julian came. He was very stern and dignified. His eyes took in the situation at a glance.

Colonel Blood rose to meet him.

"It's mighty friendly of you to have joined us, my lord."

"Colonel Blood," said his lordship with asperity. "I find your humor a little forced. I don't know what may be your intention, but I wonder do you realize the risks you are running?"

"And I wonder did your lordship realize the risk to yourself in following us aboard as I had counted that you would do?"

"What shall that mean, sir?"

Blood signaled to the negro standing behind Bishop.

"Set a chair for his lordship. Jerry, send his lordship's boat ashore. Tell them he'll not be returning yet awhile."

"What's that?" cried his lordship. "Blister me! D'ye mean to detain me? Are ye mad?"

"Better wait, Jerry, in case his lordship should turn violent," said Blood. "You, Tim," he addressed the negro, "you heard the message. Carry it to Hayton. Bid him deliver it.

"Will you tell me what you intend, sir?" demanded his lordship, quivering with anger.

"Just to make myself and my lads here safe from this murdering blackguard's gallows in Port Royal. I've said that I trusted to your gallantry not to leave him in the lurch, but to follow him hither, and there's a note from his hand gone ashore to summon the harbor-master and the commandant of the fort. Once they are aboard, I shall have all the hostages I need for our safety."

"You scoundrel!" said his lordship through his teeth.

"Sure now that's entirely a matter of the point of view," said Blood. "Ordinarily it isn't the kind of name I could suffer any man to apply to me. Still, considering that ye willingly did me a service once, and that ye're likely unwillingly to do me another, I'll overlook your discourtesy, so I will."

His lordship laughed.

"You fool," he said. "Do you dream that I came aboard your pirate ship without taking my measures? I informed the commandant exactly how you had compelled Colonel Bishop to accompany you. Judge now whether he or the harbor-master will obey the summons, or whether you will be allowed to depart as you imagine."

Blood's face fell.

"I'm sorry for that," said he, gravely.

"I thought you would be," answered his lordship.

"Oh, but not on my account. It's the deputy-governor there I'm sorry for. D'ye know what ye've done? Sure now, ye've very likely hanged him."

"My ——!" cried Bishop, in a sudden increase of panic.

"If they so much as put a shot across my bows, up goes their deputy-governor to the yard-arm. Your only hope, colonel, lies in the fact that I shall send them word to that effect. And so that you may mend as far as you can the harm you have done, it's yourself shall bear them the message, my lord."

"I'll see you —— before I do," fumed his lordship.

"Why, that's unreasonable and unreasoning. But if ye insist, another messenger will do as well, and another hostage aboard—as I had originally intended—will make my hand the stronger."

Lord Julian stared at him, realizing exactly what he had refused.

"You'll think better of it now that ye understand?" quoth Blood.

"Aye, in God's name, go, my lord," spluttered Bishop, "and make yourself obeyed. This —— pirate has me by the throat."

His lordship surveyed him with an eye that was not by any means admiring. Then he shrugged and turned to Blood again.

"Very well," he said slowly. "But, stab me, if I understand. I suppose I can trust you that no harm will come to Colonel Bishop if you are allowed to sail?"

"You have my word for it," said Blood. "And also that I shall put him safely ashore again without delay."

Lord Julian bowed stiffly to the cowering deputy-governor.

"I do as you desire me, sir," he said, coldly, and on that took his departure, escorted by Blood to the entrance ladder at the foot of which still swung the *Colleen's* own cock-boat.

"Good-by, my lord," said Blood, and proffered a parchment that he had drawn from his pocket. "It's the commission. Bishop was right when he said that it was a mistake."

"I am sorry," said Lord Julian, sincerely.

"In other circumstances—" began Blood. "Oh, but there! Ye'll understand. The boat's waiting."

Yet with his foot on the first rung of the ladder, Lord Julian hesitated.

"I still do not perceive—blister me if I do!—why you should not have found some one else to carry your message to the commandant and kept me aboard as an added hostage for his obedience to your wishes."

Blood's vivid eyes looked into the other's that were so clear and honest, and he smiled.

A moment he seemed to hesitate. Then he explained himself quite fully.

"It's the same reason," said he, "that's been urging me to pick a quarrel with you so that I might have the satisfaction of slipping a couple of feet of steel into your vitals. The reason's name is Arabella Bishop. It was in the hope of redeeming myself in her eyes that I accepted this commission that ye brought me. But I have discovered that that is beyond accomplishment, which is why I have returned you the commission.

"I have discovered also that if she's choosing you, as I believe she is, she's choosing wisely between us, and that's why I'll not have your life risked by keeping you aboard whilst the message goes by another who might bungle it. And now perhaps ye'll understand. I have told you because—oh, plague on it!—so that ye may tell her, so that she may realize that there's something of the unfortunate gentleman left under the thief and pirate she accounts me, and that her own good is my supreme desire. Knowing that, she may—faith, she may remember me in her prayers. That's all, my lord.

Lord Julian looked at the buccaneer in silence a moment. In silence he held out his hand and in silence Blood took it.

"I wonder whether you are right," said his lordship, "and whether you are not the better man."

"Where she is concerned, do you make sure that I am right. Good-by to you."

Lord Julian went down the ladder, and was pulled ashore. From the distance he waved to Blood, who stood leaning on the bulwarks watching the receding cockboat.

The *Colleen* sailed within the hour, moving lazily before a sluggish breeze. The fort remained asleep, and there was no movement from the fleet to hinder her departure. Lord Julian had carried the message effectively and had added to it his own personal commends.

In tow of the *Colleen* went a sloop, manned by Jamaica sailors got together at the last moment. To this sloop Colonel Bishop was transferred when some five miles out to sea, and thus sent back to sleep that same night in Port Royal.

THE ORCHID HUNTER

by Richard Butler Glaenzer

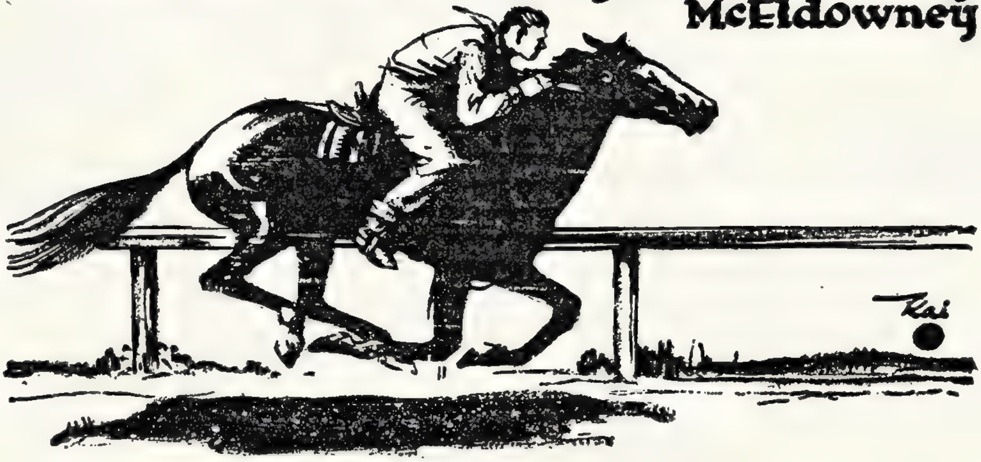
IF YOU seek a life that's thrilling,
  Sport that's bigger than Big Game,
Lion, bear or tiger killing,
  Risks that foresight can not name,
Then become an orchid hunter;
It will put the wildest Gunter
  Yellow-back to utter shame.

And by orchids I am speaking
  Not of those in Mexico,
But the rare ones found by sneaking
  Into Dyak Borneo,
Or by combing Madagascar
Where the natives make a Lascar
  On a jamboree seem slow.

When it's elephants you're spooring
  You are armed against surprize;
But the orchid though alluring
  Is a devil in disguise;
Lovely vampire of the jungle—
Beauty tempting you to bungle
  Where the man who bungles dies.

SOLOMON

A Complete Novelette by Homer Irving McEldowney



THE AGED papyri of ancient Egypt tell a tale of a powerful king, unsurpassed in wisdom. His harem, with its dark-eyed beauties, more numerous than the myriad locusts that infested the kingdom each seventh year, was the envy of lesser rulers from near and far. Solomon was a far-famed king, and quite rightly so.

But about the mesquite-root camp-fires of the Borderland there circulate tales of another king, monarch of all that he pounded beneath his unshod hooves—a great desert stallion, wild as his desert and mountains. Wisest of all the wild creatures, and wiser than man, he led his picked band of mares where the water-holes were deepest and coolest and the grazing most plentiful.

In the veins of the band flowed the best blood of the Border country—the fleetest of wild mares, the most unconquerable of outlaws, and the choicest blooded stock of the Arizona and Texan ranges, coaxed from paddock, corral, or picket-line by this great wooer from the desert. To Border ranchmen the desert king was known as Solomon. By the Mexicans farther south he was called El Sol, The Sun, and the great stallion—a golden gleaming sorrel, with full whipping white mane—was all that the Spanish name implied—living, breathing fire.

SILHOUETTED, black against the deepening red of the setting sun appeared the rugged outline of a horse and rider. The hot dust-laden breeze from the desert stirred to life the black mane, as the great head was raised to gaze down into the broadening valley below. The massive head, deep barrel-like chest, and broad heavy withers spoke of power and stamina—of a mighty endurance.

The rider, lean, rangy, alert and eager—leaning far forward in the saddle and shading his eyes as he searched the distant slope—presented a marked contrast to the mountain of a horse beneath him.

A stallion's challenge shrilled up from below and the great dark roan on the crest answered belligerently. Then horse and rider dropped from the sky-line and began a ponderous descent into the valley. Twilight was deepening, but a short distance in the lead could be seen the dusky outline of a horse leisurely working his way over the valley floor, grazing the sparse bunch-grass in his path. The white mane, waved by each toss of the head, seemed a signal, and the man, rising in his stirrups, shouted his response.

Night fell quickly, black in the valley before the stars blinked on for the night. The man dismounted, unsaddled, hobbled the big roan, and with a friendly slap of the hand sent him off to graze while he quickly made comfortable his camp for the night.

Licking flames cast fantastic shadows about the mesquite-brush blaze, as the light breeze that had risen with the coming of darkness carried off the savory whiffs of frying bacon and boiling coffee.

The man ate in hungry silence. Then dreamily watching the flickering fire die to a mass of glowing embers the man spoke now and again, to the fire, the darkness, the horse, or to himself, with seeming satisfaction. He absently tossed more brush upon the little fire, and arose, whistling for the horse. A responding nicker came from the near-by mesquite, and the man stepped from the light of the fire into the darkness. A black form loomed before him and a friendly nose nuzzled at his pockets.

"No more sugar this trip, Boulder, Old Boy. Nope, nary a bit." He patted the neck of the great roan, rubbed him amiably between the ears, and then dropping his voice to a confidential rumble, talked over the events of the day.

"Boulder, Old-Timer, we've got 'im goin'. See the limp he's a-packin' in his left foreleg, when we pushed 'im to a trot over that hard rock mesa? Solomon's goin' lame! Believe it or not, you old reprobate—tomorrow, or next day at latest will see Solomon roped, hobbled, an' hog-tied—an' eatin' out o' my hand.

"Shake your fool head!—a lot you know. Here, lend me one of them long ears, Old Hoss—you're due for a whalin' big surprize. Your boss an' sugar-dispensaree, Worth Worthington wins!"

A few moments later, the man said—

"Horse dreams, Old Boy—*buenas noches*." He kicked off his boots, slipped between the blankets, and with saddle beneath his head gazed at the cold little stars till he slept.

The first streaks of dawn were showing in the east as the man rode up the valley, the great roan wide awake to the day's duties, champing impatiently at the bit. It lightened from moment to moment and soon the large oval tracks of an unshod horse became visible in the sand. They led straight out of the valley and onto the mesa above.

Solomon held to the high ground where vision was unobstructed and there was no possibility of ambush. Horse and rider clambered up the last steep slope and gained the tableland. Here all traces of the fugitive stallion ended.

"It's been dry goin', Boulder—with promise of a —— sight worse, 'fore we're through! But I know this country some, an' there's water not more'n fifteen miles further, nearer twelve, I'd say. Old Solomon knows it too. Reckon he's well on his way by now, so's to tank up an' be off before we're in sight." With a slap and cheerful, "Let's be goin', Boulder," he put the roan to a tireless trot that devoured the miles, taking across country southeast, as straight as the crow flies.

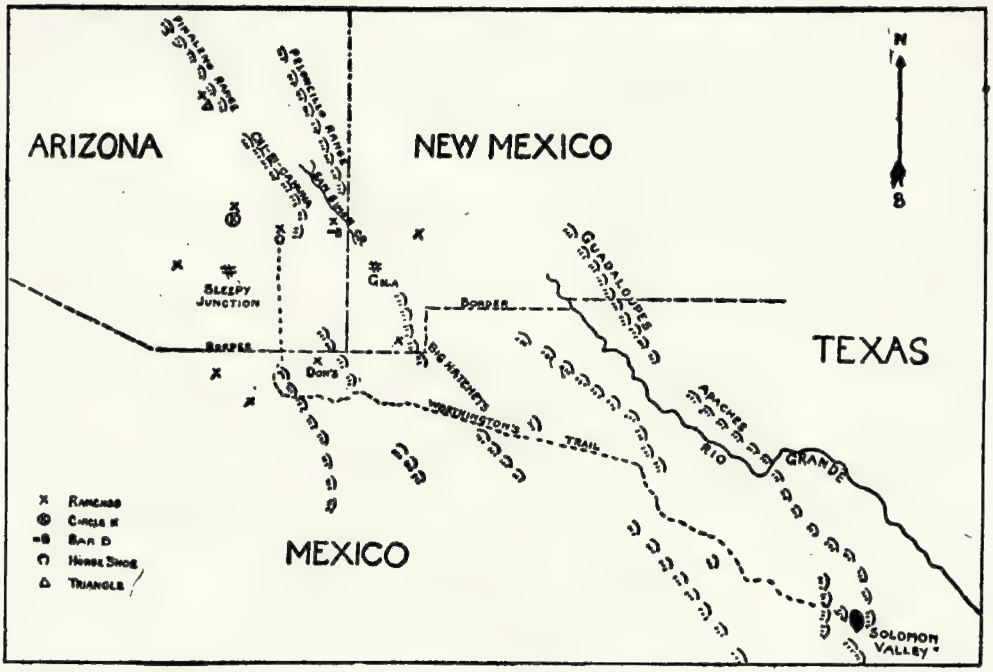
The country became more rugged as the miles slipped behind—less mesquite, more gray-brown rock, with here and there a giant cactus. The sun grew to blinding intensity. The sand had turned from gray-brown to a glaring yellow and over it the heat rose in shimmering, dazzling waves.

The great roan, black with sweat, a stream trickling from his girth, white lather flecking his shoulders and flanks, showed the marks of the grueling pace.

"Can't be so much further, Boulder, Old Boy, I know —— well." The man brought the horse to a willing halt and dismounted. The water in the nearly empty canteen was lukewarm and stale, but the man held it to his lips a moment with evident relish, and then moistened the roan's dusty nostrils with a dampened cloth.

THE pair pushed steadily on, always in a southeasterly direction, cleaving to a straight line except where uneven breaks in the country made detours a necessity. Little dust puffs rose from the tired roan's hooves as he plodded doggedly forward. Mile after weary mile fell behind, and the man showed a growing uneasiness. He swept the rugged draws and slopes for signs of green that should be visible if the water-hole had not gone dry.

With the memory of a born plainsman he should have no trouble recognizing old and familiar landmarks—but there were none. The feeling grew upon him as the hours wore away—he was lost, deep in the Mexican wilderness, ignorant of the paths and the water-holes. He reined in the roan for a moment's rest—and as they paused there a moving object appeared, clear against the sky-line of a crest two miles to the south. Then it dropped from view—but the man in the momentary glimpse had recognized the desert sorrel.



He pushed the roan to a faster pace, and as he paused at the top of the last rugged slope—there was Solomon, less than a mile out upon the mesa. Then began a killing test of endurance. For a time the stallion held the lead, then the ever watching man noted signs of increasing lameness. Little by little the lead dwindled to three-quarters, then to a half—and Solomon's uneasiness grew with each backward glance.

His sorrel coat had darkened to almost black and dripped sweat. He was streaked with lather and each step brought with it twinging pain. No sand lay upon the mesa. The smooth surface was hard as granite. In vain the fleeing, tortured Solomon searched for signs of broken country that would lead down off the hard rock tableland and afford the relief of soft sifting sand.

Worthington, too, swept the mesa for signs of green that should lead to the welcome water-hole. Then his gaze returned to the fugitive horse—rather, to the spot where he had been. He looked again—squinted, shading his eyes with his hands. Solomon had disappeared as suddenly and completely as though swallowed up. The mesa stretched on, unbroken but there was no signs of the horse.

"Mighty peculiar, eh, Boulder? I'll say it is! Never been this far south—all new to me—but there must be a rift o' some kind in the mesa out there."

The man paused a few moments, then pushed on toward the south and the point at which Solomon had disappeared. The mesa rose somewhat as he rode. Horse and rider topped a gentle rise and slid to an abrupt halt.

There at the roan's very feet opened a jagged gorge, leading, twisting, deep down into the bowels of the great rock mesa. The imprints of countless unshod hooves, coming and going, intermingled in the floor sand of the gorge, but clear-cut and fresher than the rest were the tracks of the desert stallion.

The man whistled softly—

"Some hole, eh, Boulder? The Lord only knows where she'll lead to, but we gotta see the other end of it."

He patted the roan's neck reassuringly and horse and rider began the descent. Perpendicular walls of rock rose sheer on either side, and as they pushed deeper the light diminished. While it had been broad daylight at the top it now seemed as though dusk had settled. Then rounding a shoulder of jagged brown rock, bright sunlight greeted the blinking man and horse.

The mouth of the gorge opened wide, the rock walls separating as they stretched away to encompass a green-floored valley, a mile in length and half as broad. The ground dropped abruptly from the roan's feet, then sloped gently on down to the narrow ribbon of water that glimmered its way through the valley to disappear among the rocks. Giant cottonwoods lined the little stream, and green grass grew luxuriantly for a distance of several hundred yards on either side.

The man rubbed his eyes, then scanned the valley walls. There was not a break in their sheer surface. A patch of green, trickling water, trees—an oasis cached among the desert mountains. It was a prison. There was but one means of entrance and exit—the twisting, deep-cleft gorge. In the narrow aperture stood the roan, his lean brown rider gazing spellbound across the valley. There a great sorrel horse, with whipping mane, lunged and tore in futile attempts to scale the invulnerable walls.

THE sun was setting as the man tossed his hat to the sand, mopped his brow, and surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction. Across the narrow opening of the gorge he had thrown up a nine-foot barricade, rough and crude in workmanship, but substantial.

"Take a bird to clear that, I reckon," grunted the man as he turned from his work to prepare a comfortable camp for the night. After a leisurely evening meal the pipe was produced, and clouds of wispy blue smoke wafted away from the outstretched form upon the blankets. From beyond the little circle of light there came the nipping crunch of the roan's grazing, intermingled now and then with a chesty snort. The trickle of water was audible from below where the little stream showed white against the darkened background.

Suddenly there came the drum of beating hooves that slid to a startled stop scarce a stone's throw distant. A snort of fear, the sound of a whirling horse, and the hoofbeats died into the night.

"Old Solomon up to see what he can see! Reckon he won't rest so easy tonight—be a-worryin' his fool head off from now till mornin'," and the man rolled over in his blankets, and slept.

The little camp was awake and stirring with the first streaks of dawn. While the breakfast simmered and boiled the man stripped the saddle of all its equipment—saddle bags, poncho, and rifle-scabbard.

"Traveling light today, Old-Timer," he called to the roan, as he strode over to saddle up. There was a pause at the stream while the horse drank. Then they forded the stream and pushed toward the lower end of the valley. Great cottonwoods obstructed the view, and the man sat alert in the saddle, straining for the first sight of the stallion.

Suddenly there came the crashing of underbrush and the pounding roar of hooves. The great sorrel burst into the open, running low, the white mane whipping over the powerful shoulders. The big roan whirled and leaped to cut off the stallion's rush but the sorrel was not to be turned. He swept by, out of range of Worthington's lariat, and raced toward the mouth of the gorge.

As the man rode clear of the cottonwoods the barricade became visible. Fifty yards from it the desert king, torn between fear of the man behind and this new obstacle in his path, that looked so like a trap.

The sorrel cast anxious glances over his shoulder at the slowly approaching pair below, then advanced gingerly toward the log barrier. He whistled in nervous fear, stopped, pawed the sand, then advanced again. Once he wheeled swiftly to pound down the slope—thought better of it, and turned back to the barred exit.

To the man below, the great sorrel stallion was wonderful—taut in every muscle, with proud head, arched neck with snow-white mane, powerful shoulders and straight back, slim legs, clean cut as those of a deer, and hooves that pounded and pawed a nervous challenge upon the sand.

Man and horse had crossed the stream and begun the ascent up out of the valley when the stallion with an impatient snort of fear and disapproval wheeled from the barrier and swept down the slope, angling to avoid the man below. Again and again the big roan and his rider worked up and down the valley in pursuit, the great sorrel's speed always serving to carry him safely beyond reach of the hissing lariat that each time fell short of its mark.

The sun, directly overhead, beat down with blinding intensity. Both the fugitive stallion and his relentless pursuers were dripping with sweat and grimy with dust. The pace was telling on all three—but most upon the fleet Solomon whose mad spurts were wearing down even the tempered steel of the desert-bred horse.

Twice the man had checked the roan in his rush to turn the stallion and the latter, sensing the slower pace, believed the roan to be weakening fast. He paused longer among the willows and cottonwoods, then broke from cover at a less extended gait, and the lumbering Boulder swerved to meet him. The stallion scarce diverged from his path, confident that the tiring roan was no longer a factor to be greatly feared.

Suddenly Boulder, galvanized to a pounding charge by spurred heels driven into his flanks, bore down upon the sorrel. Solomon slid to a startled stop in a flurry of sand, whirled, and leaped away toward the lower end of the valley. But swifter than he, sped the slowly opening noose, whipped from the eager hand of the man.

It dropped over the stallion's head and tautened with a singing twang, as the big roan with braced fore feet and haunches in the sand slid to a stop. The sorrel's rush was checked with a jerk and his feet were whipped from under him.

WITH a threshing of hooves the stallion regained his feet, despite the roan's valiant attempt to hold the rope taut, and again broke for the open, only to be thrown as cruelly as before by the snake-like lariat that bit into the glossy neck.

"Goin' to bust yore fool neck or wreck this saddle o' mine, yuh —— fool," growled the man, as Solomon again clambered to his feet and lunged away. But in place of the tautening of the lariat followed by the jolting thud that took much of the fight momentarily out of him, Solomon felt only a steady pressure, and throwing back his head—there was the roan running behind him.

Then the stallion ran, low and swift, with a rhythmic beat of hooves that cast back cutting slashes of pebbles and sand. The ground streaked from beneath the man like the ties beneath an express, and the wind roared in his ears.

Drawn by the wild burst of the great stallion the big roan was pounding over the ground faster than ever before. Up and down the valley they thundered—the sorrel tiring fast under the killing pace and effort.

Slowly the man checked the roan to a trot, a walk, and finally to a halt. Solomon fought gamely, but he could no longer drag the man and horse. Foam and sweat trickled and dripped from him. He was grimy with dirt, but his eyes still blazed their savage challenge. Taking in upon the lariat, hand over hand, the man had ridden to within a few paces when with a blast of rage the great stallion charged.

Bared teeth showed in the blood-flecked mouth, the fore hooves struck like twin pile-drivers, and there was the lust to kill in the stallion's raging eyes. The roan whirled in fear, all but unseating the man who lashed savagely with his long quirt at the head of the fighting stallion.

Again and again the quirt descended, the biting lash cutting close to Solomon's eyes. He whirled from the attack and charged down the slope, only to be again snapped up short and thrown upon his flank. He struggled to his feet, trembling in every limb, while the man blindfolded the roan.

Then mounted upon the unseeing horse, Worthington advanced. Again the stallion charged and the man slashed till he sought flight, racing down the valley, with the big roan no longer twenty yards behind, but now almost neck and neck. The ever ready quirt lashed mercilessly each time the fighting stallion sought to rend the blindfolded roan with snapping, crunching teeth, or to strike with the lightning swift hooves.

Twice up and down the valley and the pace had dropped from a racing gallop to a jog-trot. On and on they went, up and down—from a trot to a walk—finally to a dead stop at the edge of the little stream. The sorrel's breath came in great gasps. He was all but exhausted.

Shaking, he watched the roan drop his nose to the cool water, and drink thirstily for a moment. The man extended a tentative hand toward the stallion's withers—

With a savage slash of the big white teeth the flannel shirt was ripped from the man's forearm. The stallion lunged back, wheeled, and again pounded down the valley, dragging the roan at his flank.

Hours later the exhausted horses again paused at the water's edge. As before the roan drank and the sorrel watched—but in the eyes the lust to kill was gone. In its place had come the dumb appeal of the brute—to drink the cool, clear water that could soothe the flaming of fire-filled veins. Slowly the desert king lowered his head, ever watchful. He nosed the rippling stream and the brown steady hand of the man softly stroked the thick white mane.

As the stallion drank deep drafts of the cool, sweet water he lost his unreasoning hate toward the man who had pursued him through days and nights, over desert and rugged mountain waste. He did not trust this man-creature—that would come only with the days and the weeks—but Worthington had paved the way to an understanding and mutual effection that was to grow in the days that followed.

A month later Worthington broke his little camp. The days had been full—work from dawn till dusk—but they had been the happiest days the man had known. To squat contentedly by his fire at night, the near-by munching of the roan and the desert stallion as music to his ears, knowing that his whistle would bring a nickered response from both, had been all the companionship that he had desired.

With steady patience, ever determined and unafraid, he had broken the desert king—put him through the steps of training, teaching him to carry a blanket, then a saddle, to wear a halter, to take the bit, and finally to carry his master, Worthington—all without sacrificing that splendid spirit that was the very life of the horse. That remained—tempered with a new force, the growing love for this man who would have his will, but was ever wise in the getting.

The man reined in the great white-crested sorrel for a moment and waved a farewell to the ribbon of water and green below.

"So long, Solomon Valley—see yuh again some day," and the little cavalcade began the climb up out of the gorge to the high mesa above—back to the home ranch, and the presence and companionship of men.

THE day's work was over. Tall brown men lounged and smoked under the cottonwoods, at ease after hours in the saddle. From the cook-shack came the rattle and din of tinware, intermingled with the jangle of never ending verses of, "O, bury me not on the lone prairee."

The heat of the day was abating—dusk was nearly at hand. The rambling ranch house nestled against the green slope of the valley, with great cottonwoods interlacing boughs above it, and the reservoir, reflecting in its cool depths the sky and the willows at the brink—the drowsy horses down in the corrals—all blended into a scene of peace and serenity.

The men rose, stretched comfortably, and sauntered toward the corrals.

"Met the Don on the south range today," rumbled big Bill Ford.

"What's the Don doin' over this way? Wasn't ridin' the Black, was he?" queried Windy Seemans, ears pricked with interest.

"Nope, not ridin' 'im, but claims he's faster'n ever—says as how money talks! Stub, how's Billy Day runnin'?"

Stub ruminated, spat twice, and bit off a fresh chew. Five feet two or three, wiry, brown, bowed deeply at the knees, and weighing not more than a hundred and ten, he presented a marked contrast to the rangy riders about him. He had been a jockey back East, had drifted out into the cattle country, and there he had stayed.

He loved horses; could ride like the wind. Ever optimistic, he was the much-loved Stub. He had ridden Billy Day in the Sweep-Stakes the year before, and losing to El Diablo, the Don's black stallion, had all but broken the little rider's heart. He cocked a bowed leg over the corral bars, cast an apprising eye upon Billy Day, and drawled,

"Looks a leetle bad—not so all fired sure as I was last year. Can't never sometimes always tell—Billy Day's better'n he was, all right. He's a fast little horse, an' he's sure game! But he's small an' that black devil will have it all his own way. Don't know, boys—but there's six weeks or so yet before the rodeo, ain't there?"

"Sure, Stub—six weeks yet—an' you an' Billy get that time to do as yuh —— please. Jest remember, we're a-bankin' on yuh to fetch home the bacon f'r the ol' Horse Shoe!"

Hooves sounded from above, followed by a welcoming hail. A man and horse stood at the edge of the mesa, above the ranch house. Another horse, riderless, moved into view. The man rose in his stirrups, swung his sombrero aloft, and chanted,

> "I'm a lone coyote—from the Guadaloupes,
> An' it's my night to howl!"

"Worth! —— if it ain't Worthington!" chorused the men below as they turned from the corrals and made for the ranch house. Fast falling dusk concealed the identity of the big sorrel stallion till Worthington was all but upon them.

"Man O' man! If it ain't Solomon hisself!" cried Stub.

"Back, boys—he's not as soft spoken as he's goin' to be. Watch his teeth an' feet. Steady, Solomon, Old Boy—nothin' to get all riled up over. All friends o' mine—an' yours too, when you get to know 'em."

"Wall, of all the —— fools," from Windy Seemans, "here we been a-mournin' yuh f'r dead, an' yuh show up astride that 'ere big sorrel devil that horse hunters an' horse thieves from here tuh Brownsville, an' the Lord himself don't know how far down into Mexico, been a-chasin' for nigh onto two years now!"

"Lord a-mighty, what a hoss," were Big Bill Ford's only words.

Half an hour, with Solomon cared for and occupying the lower paddock, the curious men lounged in the cook-shack doorway while the hungry Worthington cut a destructive path through the array of food which Greaser Charlie heaped before him. To the man who for weeks had eaten nothing but salt meat and hardtack, the food before him was a banquet.

He found time for only an occasional short reply to the volley of inquiries, until half of a juicy blue-berry pie had been disposed of. Then he wiped his lips, drew a deep sigh of satisfaction, and tilted comfortably in his chair.

"All ready, boys. Fire away," he invited, and for an hour or more the lean brown men sat about the cleared table while Worthington recounted the pursuit of the stallion, the capture, and the days spent in breaking him to the bit, the saddle, and a rider. Then the men rose, Stub took down the lantern that hung by the range, and led the way to the bunk-house.

A desert stallion, perhaps the most noted outlaw on the range, had been captured—but the grim calls of the following day were not to be denied. As riders who spent long hours each day in the saddle, covering countless dusty miles, these men knew the value of sleep.

Worth tumbled into his welcome bunk, tossed restlessly for a time, the soft resiliance of springs a contrast to the bed of packed sand he knew so well, then dropped off to sleep till the clang of Greaser Charlie's blows upon the great iron triangle that hung outside the cook-shack door, announced breakfast and the duties of a new day.

THE days that followed were filled full from morn till dusk. Windy and Big Bill rode the north range, reporting numerous breaks in the fence which demanded attention. Chauncey Devine, blond slim puncher from southern California, with José, the half-breed, roped, lunged, and rode the fiery little mustangs down in the south corral that would in time make valuable cow ponies for the Horse Shoe.

Astride an unbroken bronco, the grinning Chauncey asked for nothing more. He sat his saddle with the ease of one born never to walk, gave the mustang his head, fanned the flattened ears with his Stetson while he roweled the foam-flecked flanks with each leaping twisting buck of the maddened pony. Nose between fore-feet, close to the sand, eyes bloodshot with the goading rage of defeat, back arched high, legs wide spread and rigid, the wicked bronco bucked straight away, sunfished, leaped stiff-legged, reared, fell back, rolled—but all to no avail.

Always there was the alert rider astride, or clear of the lashing hooves and ready to vault to the saddle before the struggling pony could regain his feet.

Stub spent his time, when not busied at chores about the ranch house and corrals, with Billy Day. The little man spent hours out upon the range with the little bay, now riding at an easy canter; then, lying upon the fleet horse's neck, he coaxed from the willing Billy greater and still greater bursts of speed.

As Stub whispered bits of encouragement and the bay responded with a drum of pounding hooves, it seemed that horse and rider fairly flew. But ever present in the mind of the little ex-jockey was the vision of a great black fighting stallion that struck to kill, and ran like the wind—the Don's El Diablo—and while Stub was ever an optimist, he was not the man to underrate a rival.

Stub was worried—signs of it broke forth at meal times—he was not his usual doughty self in the evening when the boys, their day's work done, smoked and talked, and talked and smoked, out under the cottonwoods.

Worth and Solomon accompanied old J. B. on his tours of inspection, seeking lost cattle among the Chiricahou draws; repairing the dam at Willow Spring, that the coming dry season should not find the cattle on the south range without water; and arranging for cattle shipments from Sleepy Junction. Each day brought the man and the great desert stallion into closer accord.

Ever mindful of the big sorrel's comfort, Worth's thought was of the horse, before all else. Each evening he swung the heavy stock saddle to the ground and gently patted the stallion's withers and back till dampness and lameness had left it. And Solomon learned to quest through the man's clothing, seeking with twitching eager lips, deep into pockets where hidden sugar lumps were ever to be found.

There remained but another week before the rodeo when Chip Dawson rode into camp in the gathering dusk, thick coated with the choking yellow dust that grew worse and worse as the dry season progressed. He brought tidings from the Bar B, over on San Simon Creek, whence the Old Man had dispatched him to arrange with Belding, the Bar B's owner, a joint shipment of beeves. He put up the tired travel-stained pony and joined the little group about the door.

"News from the Don, boys! Chet Lane, over to the Bar B, tells me the Don's backing his Black with all he's got—an' his herd o' vacqueros are with him to a man. Belding reckons there'll be twenty thousand pesos on El Diablo, an' the boys over at the Bar B are sure rarin' to know how Billy Day's a-showin'."

"Twenty thousand, eh?" came slowly from old J. B. "Lot o' money, my boys—to shoot up on a horse race. But give that whelp an inch an' he'll take a mile—if we don't fade the four-flusher we'll get —— little peace on the Border. Gregorio's been makin' his money too fast—faster than honest men make it in these parts," he added darkly.

"Well, we ain't goin' to have to raise the whole ante right here, I reckon, so why get hermantile? There's Belding an' the Bar B boys; an' MacQueen's Circle K crowd will want in on it, sure."

"Not so sure, Windy. They haven't forgotten the lacing the Black handed Billy Day last year. No, they don't forget so easy," answered old J. B. as he thrust back his worn Stetson from white locks that contrasted with the mahogany burn of his weather-beaten face, "an' I don't know but what it's better so. Belding and MacQueen are friends o' mine, their men are friends o' yours, an' we've got mighty little grounds for believin' the little bay can show the Black a clean pair o' heels.

"No, boys. Admittin' there's snothin' I'd like better'n hangin' up the Don's hide, still it ain't our place to let these friends o' ourn in on a likely trimmin'."

The old man rose and left the little group, while the remaining men talked in subdued tones for a time. Then they, too, dispersed—some toward the bunk-house, others toward the spring or the cook-shack. Stub found Worthington at his elbow as he peered through the corral bars.

"STUB, yore worried. What's the big idea? Billy Day fallin' down?"

"Naw!" retorted the little ex-jockey, instantly hostile. "Gamest little hoss in the —— country—fight to the last ditch, an' die a-runnin'."

"Won't argue with you there, Stub, Old Man—Billy Day's game clear through—but he's a long ways from bein' the fastest horse in these parts."

"What the —— do yuh mean by that?" The little man, white under the tan, faced the tall Worthington with hands clenched at his sides. He loved the little bay and believed in him, heart and soul. This seeming slur upon the horse's prowess, so dear to the heart of the little ex-jockey, had cut to the quick.

"Just what I say," coolly answered the other. "——, Stub, I like the little bay. He's some little horse—but take Solomon there. He'd just up and leave 'im. Billy's not big enough—an' he's shy on the legs to make a real runner."

Stub controlled himself with an effort. His eyes flashed with anger, but he asked casually enough:

"How much chance do you reckon yore sorrel'd have with you in the saddle—I shore wouldn't ride him, if I could—against the Black with the Don's boy Pasqual tippin' the beam at a hundred an' twelve a-ridin' 'im? A —— of a lot, I'd say!" Stub laughed in harsh derision. Worthington glanced down at his booted and spurred feet and murmured—"A hundred and seventy-odd." Then he looked up, a challenge in his eyes.

"Pretty good chances, Stub. I reckon better than Billy Day's got as it is." The little man snapped him up in a flash. "Fifty says Billy Day beats yore —— sorrel, a mile an' back!"

"Tomorrow," Worthington accepted the offer with a grin, turned and made his way up the slope to the bunk-house.

"O Stub! Better hit the flop, Old-Timer," he called back from the darkened doorway, but Stub neither moved nor answered.

Next morning there was nothing said of the proposed race. The forenoon passed as usual, Stub taking the bay for an easy workout down on the south slope, while Worthington saddled Solomon and accompanied old J. B. on his ride to inspect conditions at Willow Spring.

The noon meal was strangely silent. Much of the good-natured banter had disappeared. The men lounged about, then saddled and rode off, each to his duties, leaving Worthington and Stub alone.

The sun was still high when Stub returned with the sweat-marked little bay. The man unsaddled, watered the horse, then stalked to the ranch house. Old J. B. sat in the shade of the wide porch, his feet perched high, a pipe tight gripped in his mouth. He looked up with inquiry in his eyes as Stub appeared.

"Well, Stub—how's Billy?"

There was an unconcealed almost boyish eagerness to the old man's tone, and there was hope in the deep gray eyes. The little man paused, gulped twice, then dived into his pocket bringing forth a plug of tobacco. He sliced off a liberal portion, stowed it away in the side of his mouth, and restored the plug to his pocket.

A blue-bottle buzzed by and came to rest in the sun, ten feet distant. Stub eyed him doubtfully a long moment—then accurately drenched him, and assured that his nerves were still good, he turned to face old J. B.

"Billy Day ain't goin' to run that 'ere race."

The old man jumped as though shot. His boots struck the floor with a thud, and his great bulk shifted forward in the creaking chair as he thundered—"Why in —— ain't he? Who in —— says he ain't?"

"I says he ain't—an' why?—Because there's another —— horse in this 'ere outfit that can beat 'im, that's why!"

"Say, young felllow—what've you been drinkin'—or is it the heat that's affectin' you this way? Better go on in an' lay down for a spell, Stub—you'll feel better after a bit," advised J. B., confident that the little rider had been overly exposed to the blazing sun. He arose to lend a helping hand into the house.

"Don't look as if you think I got bats in my belfry I ain't It ain't either too much moonshine, nor too much sunshine, just plain plumb facts, that's what. An' them facts cost me fifty cold iron men."

Then Stub related to the incredulous old man the results of the bet and the race.

J. B. met Worthington at the corrals when he returned with Solomon later in the afternoon.

HE WAS a different J. B.—like a big boy, all eagerness and grin. Worth again and again had to warn him to keep out of the big sorrel's way, as he unsaddled, watered, and led Solomon back to his paddock. The old man shot questions in tumbling succession.

Not till now had he admitted, even to himself, just how hard the defeat of the bay the year before had hit him, nor how much the defeat of the Don's black stallion would mean to him. For years there had been a mounting antagonism between these two men—old J. B., the typical American ranchman, straight-forward in his dealings, four-square with his men—Don Gregorio, the Castilian lover of horses, women, and intrigue.

Affairs had culminated in bloodshed when just as the dry season set in, a year before, the spring at Leaning Rock had been blasted and the Horse Shoe's west range ruined. Evidence pointed to the Don and his vacqueros, but nothing was ever proved. Later there had been fences cut on the south range and bands of steers driven off, across the Border, and into the south. Again suspicion fastened upon the Don, but the work, if it were his, was well done. Trails were obliterated by legitimate herds run over them, and the stolen cattle were never found.

The strong personal feeling of enmity between J. B. and the Don had caused the Sweepstakes race to assume greater importance than a mere horse race. It meant supremacy for either American or Mexican upon the Border in that most highly prized possession of these riders of the ranges—a swift horse. And for the past two years it had been a toss-up between the Horse Shoe's fleetest and the best that the Don could offer.

There had been a score or more of entries, not more than one from each outfit, but El Diablo and Billy Day had proved superior to all the rest.

The evening meal was a buzz of questions and conjecture. All knew the big sorrel stallion to be fast, and possessed of wondrous endurance, but that he should have outrun the fleet bay, carrying a sixty pound handicap was scarcely believable. Confidence was deep rooted—these were not men to swing quickly from one favorite to another—and they had been willing to back Billy Day to the limit.

The affirmation from Stub's own lips, however, was convincing. The sorrel had beaten the bay, and beaten him badly.

J. B.'s chair scraped back from the table as he rose. There was a grim smile upon his bronzed old face as he thumped the boards with a ponderous fist.

"Boys, this is somethin' to keep under our hats. Let the greaser think he's nothin' but the little bay to beat. He'll offer the sky as the limit. We'll tip off the Bar B and Circle K crowds on the quiet, an' when the shoutin's all over the Don'll be busted higher'n a kite, an' off for the south to save a whole skin!"

"It sounds to me!" chorused the men as they jostled boisterously from the room and trooped toward the corrals to look over the horse that was to carry their money and uphold the Horse Shoe name and fame in the coming rodeo—Solomon.

Next morning Chip Dawson pelted over the fifteen miles to the Circle K, returning in the afternoon. MacQueen's men pommelled his back in hearty approbation, and sent him off with the assurance of secrecy and ready financial suport.

All loved a sporting proposition, and the Don was not unfavorably known by the Horse Shoe alone. The Circle K could be depended upon to be on hand when the time came—pockets well lined with dinero.

Stub dropped in on the Bar B, finding an even more volatile crowd there. Belding was ready to stand good personally for five thousand, and his men were willing and eager to bet all they owned and as much advance pay as Belding would stand for. Stub's account of the manner in which the desert stallion had outrun the Horse Shoe's bay was impressive evidence.

They knew Stub as a rider and they trusted his judgment implicitly. Sure they'd all be there—r'arin' to go—and *gracias, gracias*, a thousand times over! Secrecy?—Mum would be the word.

* * *

GILA was not the town she once had been. The Bucket-o'-Blood had more than lived up to its sanguine name, and the Oasis, across the way, had seen a man die with his head in a noose that hung from her ridge-pole. Adobe walls and heavy wooden sills displayed the lead scars of drunken punchers and of marauding bandits. The little graveyard, on the outskirts of town, told its tale in bleak crosses of the men who once had been.

But all that had been in the free, wild days—before the début of law and order. Now there remained to the little town of Gila nothing but the rodeo, to which last reminder of the crumbled glory of the past she clung with the ardor of a religious fanatic for her sacred creed.

It was high noon, and the sun beat down upon the yellow dusty trench that sliced its ugly way through the center of town—Division Street. Sleepy saddle horses dozed at the rails before the Bucket-o'-Blood and the Oasis, and farther down the street, where the Rio held forth inducement to thirsty souls assembled there on Gila Day.

Sulkies, rigs, and buckboards lined the street, the horses between the shafts bedecked with ribbons, nose bag, and fly net, content to doze and eat, and eat and doze, despite the blinding heat. Gila's human population wisely sought the comparative comfort of sheltered interiors. Activities did not begin till two o'clock and they were averse to braving the heat of a noon-day sun without due cause.

Within the Oasis saloon, for the Oasis was still a saloon, sweating men in gala garb lined the bar or gathered 'round the tables. The mayor of Gila stood for law and order—so did her sheriff—but who could have the hardness of heart to deny these lonely boys from off the range their black jack, poker, and craps on this, Gila's gala day—dearer to the stanch hearts of her citizens than the well-known Fourth of July.

Colors clashed and blended—reds, blues, yellows, and greens—silk scarfs, fleecy chaps, and burnished tinkling spurs. There was Duncan and his crowd from the Peloncillo Range, the Triangle boys, Gleason from the San Carlos, the Hartmann brothers from their range up in the Big Hatchets, Belding's Bar B boys, the Circle K outfit, and countless others, all on hand to boost, bet, rope, or ride.

Talk shifted from the buckaroo riding to the roping contest, only to come back to the most talked of event of the day—the two-mile Sweepstakes.

The Don had arrived in town the night before, and, accompanied by his ever present henchman, the big half-breed Fronteras, had made the round of the three saloons leaving ten thousand pesos with each proprietor, to be placed before noon the next day on the black stallion, El Diablo.

J. B. had requested the Bar B and Circle K to maintain strict silence upon the Horse Shoe's changed entry, and had wrung the promise from both Belding and MacQueen that they would hold off on the betting till the Horse Shoe boys arrived in Gila. It was past twelve and they had not appeared.

Sudden silence fell, occasioned by a stir at the door. A high-heeled dapper figure stepped to where the proprietor lounged in easy conversation, and with a slight nod of the head and a sweep of the hand indicated his wish to have words with him. They talked for a few moments—the dark stranger with rising excitement. Then he spun on his heel and faced the crowded room.

Not tall, but boyishly slim and graceful, with the black hair and olive skin of the Spaniard, he was a striking figure. He was unarmed, but he beat his breast and rose upon his toes in defiance as he informed the assembled ranchmen that the greater part of thirty thousand pesos remained uncovered, and challenged them to back their favorites.

Not wholly bravado, but spurred on by avarice, the Don persisted in his efforts. Not a man accepted the challenge. Then it was that the Don cast prudence to the winds, whirled, and with great burnished silver spurs clinking with each angry stride, crossed the room, and spoke a few low quick words to the proprietor who disappeared through the door behind the bar.

In a moment he returned with a heavy canvas sack which he tossed upon the bar. The Don pounced upon it and held it high over his head.

"*Caramba!* I hold in my hands ten thousand pesos! Is there not one who dares to bet upon the race?" He searched scornfully about the room. "I will give the odds, if it is that you fear the risk. Three to two I will bet upon the great El Diablo—Hear!—Hear! Three to two!" he cried as he shook the offered money before the eyes of the near-by men. But not one of them stepped forward to take him at his word.

With an oath the man hurled the canvas sack to the tobacco-stained floor and shouted—"Two to one on my El Diablo! Two to one!" Several of the men who had edged in close pushed forward and placed their money upon the bar—not over five hundred all told.

The Don turned to the proprietor, tossed him the bag with the words that he would be in to take over the money if it wasn't placed, he flung out of the saloon, mounted his horse on the run, and cantered away up the street.

Ten minutes later there was a rumble of hooves and voices, as the Horse Shoe boys with old J. B. at their head, drew rein before the Oasis, tossed reins over drooping heads, and trouped to the bar. Belding and MacQueen rose and strode over to meet them.

They talked in low tones over a round of drinks. Then the three older men accompanied the proprietor into the little room beyond and closed the door.

A few moments later they reappeared, drank again, then casually moved toward the door, edged out, sauntered across the street and entered the Bucket-o'-Blood. Here they quietly covered the Don's money, drank at the bar, stalked out of the door and over to the standing horses. Then they swung into the saddle and moved off down the street at a trot in the direction of the Rio.

Arrived at Gila's third saloon, the men dismounted, filed inside, drank to the afternoon's success, and covered the Don's remaining ten thousand pesos—all at odds of two to one on El Diablo.

THE rodeo was in full swing. Ranch folk from miles and miles around had turned out in their best, which meant their brightest, and vehicles of all kinds, horsemen, and pedestrians thronged the flat sand strip at the edge of town on which feats of daring were performed each year.

Men and women were like children—all

eyes and lively interest, whole-hearted and loud in their open approval or disapproval of the participants. There had been steer riding and bull-dogging, filled with thrills and luckily free from accidents.

The wild horse race, in which five unbroken ponies were saddled and led to the scratch, and then turned loose in the hope that at least two would take their riders in the right direction and make it a race, had been a fiasco—but an hilarious one for the appreciative onlookers.

Then had come the buckaroo riding—men mounted on renegades and outlaws that bucked, fought, struck, and threw themselves in savage attempts to shake off the clinging roweling riders. Shorty McCavvy from the Peloncillo took first honors in the event, having ridden the Deacon, worst outlaw on the range, to a heaving, frothing, broken standstill.

Christy Ball, one of MacQueen's men, took the steer roping contest with a time lapse of 32 and 2/5 seconds from the steer's charge through the open corral gate till Christy raised his right hand over the downed steer, as he lay with great rolling eyes, bawling threats, three feet lashed securely together with the tie-rope.

Then in the midst of the fancy roping and snap-shooting exhibition the announcer, arrayed in a great blue polka-dot neckerchief and flaring red fleece chaps, astride a calico pony, announced in a voice that rolled and pealed out over the crowd, even unto the least attentive ears:

"Next will be THE EVENT of the DAY—the two-mile SWEEPSTAKES—seven ENTRIES! The hosses will line up for the start as now named. From the LEFT—Silver Tip, Dolly D, El Diablo, Sanderson II, Pedro, Calico Cayuse, and Solomon!"

The crowd milled like cattle in an attempt to gain the best point of vantage for the coming race. They thronged about the judge's stand and jammed both sides of the track for a distance of several hundred yards.

The riders stood before the stand receiving final instructions. The race was to start at the scratch, at the shot of a pistol, extend over a mile of open plain to the point where a group of mounted men were waiting, and finish before the judge's stand. There was no weight limit but most of the riders were spare, small, and light. Worthington loomed head and shoulders above the others as he turned and made his way to where Solomon, with champing bits, restlessly stamping, awaited him.

The man spoke softly to the great sorrel as he adjusted the light pad—he was not using the heavy stock saddle. The others were wheeling, backing, and spurring their mounts to the scratch when Worthington swung astride Solomon and, stroking the arched neck, all the while speaking in low soothing tones, urged the wild stallion forward.

The Horse Shoe entry had drawn number seven, so the sorrel would run on the flank. Worthington reined in on the starting line two lengths beyond the Calico Cayuse.

Two of the riders near the center were having trouble with their mounts. Twice the judges called for the start but the man with the pistol withheld firing to give the handicapped riders an opportunity to bring their horses up to the line and hold them there.

Suddenly there sounded the scream of a horse, and a great black form reared itself, gleaming head and neck extended, ears laid close, striking in fiery rage at the horse on the right. It was El Diablo—not without reason had he been called The Devil. The little rider up on the dapple stallion, Sanderson II, protested volubly against riding beside the black. Pandemonium broke loose while Pasqual, the Don's boy, attempted to force the black into his position and hold him there. It was impossible.

With the red light of battle in his eyes El Diablo slashed with wicked teeth and struck savagely, right and left. At the repeated command of the starter the black was finally reined from the scratch and led around to a position on the flank, beyond Solomon.

"Ready?" sounded, and the little mare, Dolly D, leaped away before the crack of the pistol. The unruly black on the flank lunged forward, then wheeled as he felt the cut of the curb, crashing into the big sorrel as he turned. Worthington's lash descended upon the sleek black haunches, as Pasqual spurred the stallion to the right, and the face of the Don went dark with quick anger.

He shook his quirt in fury—his lips moved to frame a fiery oath, but the crack of a pistol and the roar of the crowd drowned the words. The five riders on the left were off as one, neck and neck, but the black had swerved with lightning swiftness upon the sorrel and his unsuspecting rider. He shrilled the whistle of the fighting stallion as he reared and struck.

SOLOMON leaped to the side, but a descending hoof struck the man's protecting chaps at the knee. With a stifled cry of pain Worthington lashed at the black as he swung away in response to the Mexican boy's hand on the curb, and swept into the open at the heels of the racing leaders. The man on the sorrel fought for control of the horse. The great stallion was wild with rage and excitement. He reared and struck at all in his path, and the crowd parted like rushing water before him. Finding himself once more in the open he lunged out with great rocking leaps, thirty yards behind the running black.

Worthington lay low in the saddle, weak with the pain of the blow, striving to calm the horse and to break him from the leaping, pounding gait to his smooth flowing run which reeled away the distance with lightning swiftness. The man spoke softly, his lips close to the big sorrel's ear, as he put a steady pressure upon the bit and stroked the flexing withers.

"Steady, Solomon—steady, Old Man—take it easy, boy, take it easy. Down—down—hold 'er steady," and slowly the sorrel began to heed the rein and voice. The gap between Worthington and the horses ahead widened somewhat, but the stallion's labored running changed to the smooth gliding motion, not so swift at first, but gaining speed as he ran—seemingly without effort.

At the half mile the sorrel was yards behind. Five horses were bunched in the lead, their riders low in the saddles, alert and watchful, casting quick glances right and left—husbanding the reserve forces of their mounts. The black had worked up and was running second—Silver Tip was in the lead, his white stockinged feet whipping grit into the eyes of the horses and men at his heels.

The Calico Cayuse had fallen behind, and the gap was widening. Greater and greater grew the distance between the spotted horse and the bunched leaders—fifteen yards—twenty—thirty—forty——

As the running sorrel's nose drew even with the Calico Cayuse's flank, then swept on, neck and neck, the great desert stallion for the first time shook off the feeling of strangeness. The crowd—the tumult—the attacking black—all had served to set the stallion wild.

He had been running berserkin, fleeing blindly from the gaudy crowd, the concussion of guns, the bellow of steers, and the lusty cheers from human throats. Now, as a wave it surged through him—this was a race. He, the one-time king of the range, loved to run. The voice of the man in his ear took on a new meaning. There was entreaty in it—a call that struck to the very heart of the horse.

The great eyes lost their bewilderment and the head raised higher as the quivering nostrils seemed to scent for the first time the presence of fleeing horses ahead. An eager, whimpering snort, like that of a great dog came from the stallion as he swept by the Calico Cayuse, and running low, and ever swifter, cut down on the riders ahead.

The sand streaked by, a blur in the eyes of the man, as he leaned forward, the whipping mane in his face. There was little motion to the man in the saddle. The thunder of hooves was not accompanied by jolt or jar. The great sorrel seemed to flow like the rush of swift water, the mane like the whipped froth of a mountain rapid.

The wind roared in the man's ears and snatched at his clothing. Then sand, grit, and pebbles mingled with the rushing wind and the man swung the racing stallion out of his path, barely avoiding collision with the leaders, checking their mounts at the mile-post.

Solomon thundered by, the man's arms taut on the reins as he sought to slacken the pace and turn the sorrel. Leaning far to one side in the saddle he swept the running horse into a wide circle. He was helpless to check the aroused stallion in the slightest, and as he rounded to in the direction of the judges' stand and the finish line a mile distant, there was over fifty yards separating him from the nearest horse.

The black stallion had leaped into the lead. The others were strung out, Sanderson II now at the black's heels. Worthington, as he gauged the distance between the sorrel's nose and the flying hooves of Dolly D felt the hopelessness of it all.

To the crowd at the finish the horse in the rear was out of the race. It was still too far distant for them to recognize the leaders and to miss the sorrel. Thoughts leaped through the man's mind. What would the boys think?—his own outfit, and the Circle K and Bar B?

He had failed them—was failing them—No! He had only given that black devil an awful handicap, that was it! And now Solomon must cut it down, down—must draw up alongside those fleet horses in the lead—pass them all. And when he swept by the black El Diablo, then he would have upheld the fame of the Horse Shoe—would have proved himself in the eyes of his fellow punchers, MacQueen's men, and Belding's. He must win!

Solomon must run as he had never run before. Worthington was no longer the cool calm master seeking to hold his mount collected and steady. He was the frenzied jockey, calling forth every ounce his horse had to give. He had thrown away his quirt. There was no need of it. For he had broken Solomon to run without aid of quirt or spur.

The low, tense eager voice in his ear was sufficient. The rider's frenzy was carried to the horse. He ran with neck outstretched, still smooth and even in his wonderful stride, but tremendous exertion showed in the corded neck and shoulders.

On, on, the sorrel swept, cutting the terrible lead to less than thirty yards at the mile-and-a-half mark. The crowd could now discern the horse without difficulty. The Don's vacqueros shouted exultantly as the black increased his lead over his nearest rival.

The ranchmen who had backed the sorrel were grimly silent. They were not men to show the white feather in a pinch, but they had expected at least a running chance against the black—and with the Horse Shoe entry running last they felt that somehow this had been a stacked deal.

THEN as the riders drew nearer and the wonderful running of the white-maned horse cut down the lead with almost unbelievable swiftness, the crowd went mad. Cheers rose in deafening volume. The Don's group were drowned in a bedlam of sound that rose like a storm.

On came the racing horses, lash and spur in evidence, as each rider sought to wring from his fast tiring mount the last spurt that would mean victory. Worth, low on the neck of the hurtling stallion, locked tense fingers in the great mane and breathed over and over—"Solomon—Solomon."

With a startled turn of the head the little rider on Dolly D gave evidence of his surprize. Thundering at his flank ran a great sorrel horse with white mane and outstretched neck. He surged past the little mare, and swerving a fraction from his path flanked the Sonora horse, Pedro. The desert stallion was wonderful in his flight—wild and free.

Stretched low, running smoothly, Solomon was cutting down the black's lead with each sweeping stride. He drew alongside Silver Tip, passed him, and in another moment was racing neck and neck with the dapple stallion, with El Diablo scarce ten yards in the lead—with a few hundred yards of open plain between him and the finish. A rocking roaring din rose from hundreds of throats—hats and many-colored scarfs sailed high above the waving, leaping crowd.

Two men, of all the crowd, restrained themselves. Those two held themselves aloof. The Don sat his horse at ease, a half-smile of confidence, of disdain upon his dark face. Handsome, devil-may-care, his was the face and form of the victor. About the deep-lashed eyes there was a trace of gloating cruelty.

Facing him, from the far edge of the track, sat J. B., straight and rigid in the saddle, his hat pulled low upon his brow. The deep tan of the open range had darkened to almost purple. His heavy jaw, protruding and tense, showed the blue of his beard that had not turned to white with the years, and a great clenched fist rested heavily upon the saddle-horn. From beneath the wide brim of the hat steel gray eyes flashed, dancing in their depths with the light of hope that neither age, storm, sun nor wind had dimmed.

Down between the rows of madly waving, shouting humanity rushed two great horses, a black in the lead, a sorrel almost a length behind. The riders lay low on the charging horses' necks, and as they swept nearer the black's rider brought his quirt into play, slashing right and left with every gallant leap of the foam-flecked striving horse. To Worthington, the massed faces that swirled by on either side were not men and women—they were flapping gew-gaws in a kaleidoscopic rush of colors, all the colors he had ever seen. They couldn't be people—just puppets, jerking arms and legs worked by strings.

He peered ahead but the hail from El Diablo's hooves blinded him. He knew that the black was close, very close, but so must be the finish line. He swayed his body slightly with the hurtling leaps of the horse beneath him. The shouting of the mob was deafening. He held his hand before his face as a shield. If he could only see!

And then as though in answer to the wish the cutting sand and sharp-edged rock no longer struck the groping hand. He opened his eyes and peered through grimy lids. There within touch of his hand was the great black stallion, the boy Pasqual lashing the dripping heaving flanks with every labored leap.

Like a flash of light Worthington's mind cleared. The blurred side lines became people once more. The tired Black at his right was only a horse—and Solomon beneath him—was more than a horse. He leaned forward and whispered into the ear of the desert stallion. The finish line appeared to leap to meet the flying horses, but the rush of the great sorrel was swifter.

The reaching head and whipping mane showed beyond El Diablo—and Solomon thundered across the line half a length in the lead.

IT had been a day never to be forgotten—the greatest rodeo Gila had ever known. It was the talk of drawling sober tongues, and tripping, tipsy ones, for days. Never had there been such a race. Never had a horse won in the face of such odds. Solomon would go down in the Gila hall of fame as the horse of all time.

A score of men had crowded forward with ready offers, foremost among them the Don, whose offer of a thousand pesos and El Diablo had been the source of never-ending comment. Contrary to all expectations the defeat of the black stallion had broken neither the Don's purse nor his spirit.

It had seemingly given him a new interest in life—Solomon. But Worthington had not wished to sell. He had mounted the desert stallion and ridden back to the daily round of duties at the Horse Shoe.

THERE was a dance in Sleepy Junction. The Horse Shoe boys had disappeared in that direction, immaculate as to neck and ears, their laughing banter mingling with the dust clouds that rose and hung over the swift moving horses. Windy, Big Bill, Chauncey, Chip, Stub; even old J. B., on the big iron-gray had joined the boys. Worthington alone remained.

He did not care to dance, and furthermore he was worried about Solomon. He had laughed off the good-natured warnings of the boys, who claimed to have seen more than mere envy in the black eyes of the Don, but there had persisted a feeling of uneasiness in his mind.

As the little band of riders swept from view down the coulée, the man rose from his seat upon the veranda, whence he had waved a farewell hand to the noisily insistent punchers of the Horse Shoe. He sauntered leisurely toward the paddock beyond the blacksmith shop, and as he drew near a friendly nicker welcomed him.

The big sorrel thrust his nose and twitching lips between the bars, jerking his head in impatient command that sugar be forthcoming. The man searched his pockets in vain for a moment. Then with the parting admonition, "Just keep your shirt on, Old-Timer," he strode off toward the cook-shack.

The door was closed. The man shoved it open and stepped within.

"Wonder what's become o' Greaser Charlie. Sure he's not off a-sparkin' with the rest of 'em!" But Charlie was nowhere to be found. Worth rummaged about till he found the desired sugar lumps, filled his pockets with a liberal supply, and returned to the expectant Solomon. Perched on the top bar, he lighted his pipe and smoked in peaceful contentment while the great stallion crunched the white lumps between even whiter teeth, tossing head and rippling mane a mute testimony to his approval of the state of things.

The man turned suddenly from his dreamy study of the distant sandy plains, turning a dull gray with the gathering dusk.

"Solomon, you're sure a changed critter. Recollect back there in old Solomon Valley? Didn't reckon you'd ever cotton to me at all, did yuh? No, and to tell the truth, I had some doubts about it myself! But here we are, best o' friends, neither o' us with even the shadow of a grudge. Great world, Old Man. Wonderful how we critters can accomodate ourselves to well nigh anythin' that comes along, men an' horses.

"Now, you for instance, narry a thought of the old life. Tell the truth, yuh don't miss the ladies an' the desert so much, now do yuh, Solomon, Old Hoss? O' course not, an' why the devil should yuh? Both sure got their sandy sides, the desert an' the women. Why, shucks! I reckon we know when we're best off, eh? I'd tell a man we do.

"Got the edge on yuh there, Solomon—always havin' been a single, simple critter, maybe I don't know what I'm missin'; but you'll have to put up with the handicap, an' make the best of it."

The sugar supply exhausted, the big sorrel lost interest, turned to a snorting investigation of the thick dust floor of the paddock, and finding a likely spot, rolled over and over, oblivious to all beyond the paddock bars. The man slipped down from his perch and made his way toward the cook-shack. It was getting on toward chow time, and a man must eat.

He lighted the lantern, for it was dark indoors, and set about preparing an evening meal that should put to shame any thought of dainties bountifully spread down in Sleepy Junction. As he worked he whistled, cheerily and clear, and once he heard an answer from the paddock.

Then there came an impatient whinney and stamping of hooves from near at hand and Worth stepped to the door. It was almost dark, and the saddle and blacksmith shop loomed near.

"Must o' forgotten the cream pinto, I reckon. Have to turn 'im loose with the rest of 'em in the big corral after I clean up this mess." And the man sat down to enjoy his evening meal. The quiet of deep dusk had settled. It was the hour for dreams and memories, if one had them.

"Sorta wish I'd stepped out among 'em tonight—feel restless, somehow," and the man set about tidying up and leaving things as he had found them.

Worthington had all but finished his work when the scream of a horse sounded from the direction of the corrals, followed by the clatter of falling bars, quick, high oaths, and the thunder of hooves that swept by, and into the night. The man leaped through the door and raced for the sorrel's paddock. The bars were down. The desert stallion was gone! Worthington turned, sick at heart, and ran toward the corrals beyond, his mind whirling, a blind rage consuming him. Here, too, he found the bars down and the corrals empty.

The raiders had been thorough in their work—not a saddle-horse was left upon the ranch, and the boys were eighteen miles away, with little prospect of return before morning. The man made his way in the direction of the cook-shack. He was breathing rapidly, through clenched teeth. In vain he sought to collect his scattered faculties and think clearly, coolly.

AS HE passed by the saddle shop a dim form reached out in the darkness. The man whirled to strike. A friendly nicker, demanding attention and companionship was anything but hostile.

It was the cream pinto, overlooked by the night-riders, completely forgotten by the man. He stroked the velvet nose of the pony a moment, then hurriedly saddled. Running to the cook-shack, he returned in a few moments with such food as his saddle-bags would hold. Then he strode to the bunk-house, slipped his cartridge belt and Colt's from the peg over his bunk, strapped it about him, kicked off his shoes, donned his boots, seized his blanket and hastened back to the waiting pinto.

A few moments later there was a swish of scattering sand and gravel, a quick pounding of hooves, and the cream pinto, with Worthington astride him, was off into the south.

The moon had not yet risen but the man held confidently to his course. Though he could see nothing in the darkness, he reasoned that the thieves would make straight for the Border, scarce fifty miles away, and that they would not attempt to hide their tracks until well on the other side. As he rode he kept a careful lookout, ahead, the Don's men—he felt instinctively that it was the Don—would not look for pursuit so soon, but he did not intend to stumble upon a lagging vacquero, dropped behind to reconnoiter.

The little cream pinto pushed forward eagerly, ears pricked into the black night, but the man in the saddle held a steady hands upon the reins. His momentary excitement had passed and he was cool, alert, thinking as he rode, knowing that this was to be no short easy pursuit and recovery of the desert stallion, but a gruelling test of endurance.

He must keep the Don within a reasonable distance, avoiding discovery, and bide his time. There was no fixed plan in the man's mind, merely the dogged determination to hang on and on; for even with the burning hate of the Don, Worthington realized how hopeless must be any attempt to recover Solomon by means other than stealth. There were doubtless from a dozen to a score of men in the Don's band, for the most part crack marksmen and riders.

As the pair pushed on into the night the moon rose, throwing its pale light across the mesquite-blotched plains. The man scanned the sand with eager eyes. There were tracks there, the fresh imprints of shod and unshod hooves. The cream pinto had instinctively followed the fast moving horses miles in the lead.

Worthington settled back in the saddle, with a relieved feeling that all would pan out as it should. The little pinto had intelligence and buck-skinned toughness. With careful riding he should be able to trail the fugitives for days, till they should have ceased their watchfulness, and thought no more of pursuit.

Dawn found him less than ten miles from the Border. Two hours later he crossed the line into Mexico, between the great concrete monuments at mile intervals that seemed observing sentinels. The country grew more rugged as he advanced. They were working into the mountains. And with the steep walls, abrupt turns, and deep ravines angling in from the flanks, came greater possibilities of ambush.

Ever on the alert the man scanned the trail and the distant crests ahead for the sign of horse or rider, but darkness settled without a living creature having broken the monotony of hours in the saddle. Worthington did not dare light a fire so he ate his cold biscuit and drank sparingly of the stale water in the warm canteen.

Then with the horse picketed near at hand the man rolled up in his blankets and stretched his weary frame upon the sand, thankful for the cool breeze that had come with the darkness.

The man was astir and had breakfasted while it was still dark, and mounting the cream pinto, was riding with the first streaks of coming dawn. All day the pair pushed forward. Through the blinding heat of the noon hours the man and horse walked and rested alternately, conscious only of parching thirst and a trail that led on and on, down steep rugged slopes, through ravines, across washouts, and dried stream beds, and over the high rock tablelands, into the south and the east.

The days that followed were of unchanging sameness, torturing heat and thirst, weariness, and the ever present fear of discovery by the men he so doggedly trailed. Each night the man camped without a fire, existing upon the diminishing supply of dry biscuit and hardtack. He was pounds lighter and his face and hands were burned and blistered from the beating sun.

The little cream pinto, run down to skin and bone under the heavy rider and stock saddle — carrying Worthington steadily whereas the horses in the lead were afforded a rest by their riders' frequent changes to the stolen mounts—had to be prodded to its feet each morning.

Never once had Worthington caught sight of the horses and men that left this heart-breaking trail across the sands. Eight days back there had been a split in the trail, a number of the horses swinging off to the left.

Worthington had guessed these to be Horse Shoe stock, driven by perhaps two or three of the Don's vacqueros. He had followed the trail that led on, confident that with these he would find the desert stallion. All through the hours and days of scorching heat, fatigue, and thirst the man clung tenaciously to the conviction that somehow, somewhere, he would overtake the tireless riders that left behind such certain evidence of their passing, yet seemed both fantom horses and fantom men.

IN THE camp of the Don and his vacqueros there had ceased to be much thought of pursuit. Miles and miles into the heart of the Mexican wilderness, there seemed little likelihood that man or beast could have successfully trailed them so far. Fifteen days had passed since the night raid and the flight, and thus far no attempt had been made to ride Solomon. The desert stallion was herded with the stolen stock through the day and left severely alone after camp was made for the night.

Then came the evening that the Don had approached and tendered friendly advances. They had been received coldly at first by the indifferent sorrel, but as they persisted he had become enraged and struck at the man. A cruel beating followed that left the silken coat criss-crossed with ridges and welts. This was not like the lashing the stallion had received at the hands of Worthington, whose punishment was always tempered with kindness.

The sensitive horse had felt that somehow it had hurt the man to strike him. With the Don and his men it was different. They gloated over each stinging, cutting lash. The stallion's defiance stirred a spirit of lust in these savage vacqueros, and they flogged him in a frenzy till the great horse dripped sweat and foam and swayed upon legs that were scarce able to support him. Then the Don had called off his men, lest they work the stallion a lasting hurt.

The following day there was an attempt made to saddle the sorrel but as before the horse defied and fought his tormentors. Again the Don stood by while his men slashed the writhing flanks till the blood flowed from biting, cutting quirts. And as the Don stood taunting the suffering stallion there sprang up in the mind of the great desert horse a hate that grew with the hours and the days—that needed but the sight of the object of its consuming fire to cause it to break forth in utter savagery.

The Don was a horseman, and he felt that this great brute hated him with every fiber of his being—that unless he were cautious the stallion might do him harm.

In the days that followed Solomon was left to his own devices. No further attempt was made to saddle him. The Don was willing to wait. He realized that the stallion hated him, but he felt that with the passing days the great sorrel would forget. The Don even had visions of the fleet desert king learning to regard him with affection, perhaps love.

Back upon the trail the dogged Worthington rode his dying horse. He had lost all count of time. His only thought was that he must push on, forward—that he must never stop. To stop meant death. His mind on the trail and that alone, he failed to recognize familiar landmarks. Had he known he might have wondered, for the trail had led down into the country over which Worthington had first trailed the desert king, when he still ran wild and free upon the ranges. But the man saw nothing of this.

Only he realized that he had not drunk for long—that the cream pinto scarce moved beneath him. Then had come the slip and the fall at the washout, and the pinto had lain still, too weak to rise again. Miles of cruel country, without water and without food, had underminded the cream pinto's strength. He had given his rider his best. He was done.

Slowly Worthington drew his pistol from the holster at his side, and lying prone as he had fallen, sighted down the weaving barrel. Then the .45 roared and recoiled in his hand. The cream pinto rolled over, kicked convulsively, and lay still.

The man rose from the sand dazed, struck speechless with the calamity that had befallen him. He had felt the weakened efforts of the horse, but had not realized how near was complete collapse. Miles from food and water, afoot, his whole being hot and cold with awakening fever, there seemed little likelihood that he should ever reach the distant water-hole, much less that he should ever again lay eyes upon the desert stallion—his Solomon.

Then into his befogged brain had crept the realization that he must go forward on foot, and that now there was greater need than ever for speed. If he were to overtake the fantom riders ahead he must hasten. It was evening, but the moon was full and would soon rise over the ridge on the left.

The man slipped the saddle-bags from their fastenings, slung them across his shoulders and plodded forward. He would make better time later as it grew lighter, but he must be moving. He did not dare to stop now.

Then the moon rose clear, bright, and cold. The trail lay there before him, distinct as under the midday sun. On, on the man plodded, conscious only of the passing hours by his fast increasing thirst. He took no note of the country about him. His mind had ceased to think of anything but the never ending trail of horse tracks in the sand.

Suddenly the earth opened before him.

WORTHINGTON halted and passed his hand vaguely before his eyes. What was this?—great hole in the earth—a cañon, opening now to engulf him? Then reason, and recognition, returned to the man's fever-throbbing eyes.

In one comprehensive moment he knew where he was, though he could in no way account for his being there. It was the gorge, the rocky path that led down into his Solomon Valley, and there were the tracks of the horses he had trailed through all that nightmare of the past days and weeks. But what could they be doing there? It must be that the Don's stronghold, far from his ranch on the Border—guessed at but never definitely located by rangers in the past—lay somewhere away to the south of this hidden valley, and the Don, aware of the water and grazing, had dropped in for the night.

The man began the descent into the gorge—and as he dropped lower and lower the moonlight from above ceased to penetrate. It was black as a pocket. Then came the sudden burst into the moon-flooded valley, light as day after the darkness of the gorge.

There at the foot of the slope, close to the fringe of cottonwoods, a fire flickered red, casting leaping shadows upon the forms about the little circle. There were men still stirring. One rose and strode toward the horses, picketed twenty or thirty yards from the fire. The man in the opening slipped behind a jutting rock; then stole to the half-standing barricade.

The men and horses were so plainly visible that to the man above it seemed impossible to avoid discovery. For long moments he lay watching the figures about the fire. Time passed. A quarter of an hour dragged into a half, then an hour, and the forms about the fire had one by one slipped from the lighted area to seek blankets and sleep. There was no sign of a guard over the camp.

For a time longer the man above waited and watched, then began a creeping descent into the valley, hoping as he crawled that none of the restive horses would make known his presence, as he drew near. He had noted one horse picketed beyond the others and although he could not distinguish the desert stallion at such a distance, he felt that it was Solomon.

It was slow painful work, crawling forward, belly to the sand, with frequent tense pauses while he lay still and motionless fearfully anticipating the shout or quick shot that would evidence his discovery. But there was no sound nor sudden movement among the still forms about the little fire, and the drowsy picketed horses were to the windward. Nearer and nearer the man crept. He swung wide of the fire, then worked in toward the horses once more. There remained but thirty yards between Worthington and his object, the horse picketed a little beyond the others, when a figure stirred. The man flattened instantly, and dropped his hand to the holster at his side. A bulky blanket shrouded form sat up, drowsily looked about, then rose and stepped over to the fire. Throwing fresh brush upon the still glowing embers, the vacquero rolled a cigaret, then squatted by the growing blaze. The man lying prone upon the sand scarce fifty yards distant cursed softly to himself.

"Why in —— did the —— greaser have to roll out at such an ungodly hour? And how long is the —— going to squat there by the fire? —— him." The blaze was growing, leaping tongues of flame threw darting gleams farther and farther out upon the sand.

"—— the greaser!" he breathed again and again, as the hand closed hungrily about the gun at his side. And then came the inspiration. With his fingers to his lips the man whistled softly, cupping his hands toward the desert stallion—the call which he had taught him.

The white crest raised instantly. The stallion gazed eagerly in the direction from which the well known call had sounded. There was only one that whistled like that—Worthington—the one man who had been kind to him, who had really known him and won his confidence and love. Here in the camp of the Don there were only enemies. The great desert stallion hated them all, and most of all, the Don.

Out there, beyond the leaping flickering light of the flames, his master, Worthington, waited—had called to him. Solomon tautened the lariat that held him, and pawed the sand.

The man at the fire had risen at the sound. It had not been loud. Worthington had muffled it as best he could, but it had been near. And the listening vacquero sought in guttural undertones to convince himself that it had been but a bird in the night. But his suspicions had been aroused and he continued to peer uncertainly beyond the circle of light.

Then, fearful lest the stallion's restless pawing might draw the man to closer investigation, Worthington staked all on a single chance. He rose to his feet, and his piercing whistled call stabbed the stillness like a knife. The man at the fire leaped toward his blankets and carbine, stumbling over sleeping forms in his path. Oaths sounded, and men startled from stillness and slumber, leaped kicking from blankets, rifles in hand.

Then there sounded the challenge of a stallion, the twang as of fingers upon a giant string. The great desert stallion had leaped to answer the call of the man. The stout picket pin was whipped from its hold with the force of a hurricane.

MIDWAY between the waiting Worthington and the picketed horses the stallion checked his rush. For the first time in months, Solomon was free. A lariat dangled from about his neck, but there was nothing to hold him. Goaded by hate of the Don and his vacqueros, the great stallion had thought only of escape, through the past days of capitivity.

His one thought had been of the wind-blown ranges, the mountain wastes, and freedom. No more to feel the lash of stinging quirt, falling again and again upon his glossy coat. No more to brook the detested presence of men.

He was free. There was nothing between him and the gorge that led back to his range kingdom. His fleet running would serve to outdistance the swiftest of pursuers. The great head was raised and a challenge pealed out into the solitude.

Then as Solomon paused upon the verge of flight there came a sweeping feeling of emptiness, of utter loneliness. A captive of the Don, the stallion had longed only for freedom, escape, return to the wild life he had known. To run, wild and free, proud king of the range, had once been the desert stallion's all. Born to the wilds, a wilderness king, it had been a part of him.

But in the past months of companionship with Worthington there had been subtle forces at work upon the heart of the desert horse. Perhaps unknown and unfelt, they were none the less enduring; for the daily quest for sugar lumps, through Worthington's pockets, the touch of his hands, and the tones of affection ever in his deep voice had gripped the heartstrings of the stallion.

The call of the wild faded before the call of human companionship and love. The desert-trained eyes of the horse swept the rugged walls of Solomon Valley, and saw far beyond; then returned to the man waiting out there upon the sand. A wilderness king, still—Solomon loved most his master, Worthington.

To Worthington ages had passed as he stood weakly swaying, as the odds against him mounted moment by moment. He had staked all on the love of the desert horse. Was it in vain? In answer the great sorrel slid to a stop almost upon him.

A lariat trailed at his heels, and as the man leaped astride the eager horse, he cast the noose from about Solomon's neck and gripped his fingers deep in the thick white mane. As the horse and rider wheeled they loomed large in the leaping light. A volley of hurried shots cracked from prone and kneeling form about the fire. The desert-stallion lunged away into the night.

A black form loomed up in the path—the Don with his great stock saddle, its silver mountings glinting in the far light of the flickering fire, hastening to his black stallion, El Diablo. With an oath the Don dropped the saddle and leaped—but the swift hurtling stallion was upon him.

With a sickening impact the man went down, a crumpled form upon the sand. Glassy eyes stared from the twisted white face as the horse and rider swept up the valley.

At the mouth of the gorge Solomon paused. Below a quiet little group gathered about a still, crumpled form on the sand. The challenge of the wild stallion pealed out across the valley, and Fronteras, the half-breed, made the sign of the cross as he stood above the still form of his master. The boy, Pasqual, whimpered as he crouched in the shadows.

Then Solomon leaped swiftly by the tumbled logs of the barricade and thundered up the gorge—up, up, to the high rock mesa above. Out upon the mesa lay the cream pinto, Worthington's saddle beside him. Miles to the north flowed the sluggish Rio Grande, through the

Borderland that should know the Don no more. And beyond the Border lay the Horse Shoe, old J. B., and the boys.

They paused at the rim, horse and rider silhouetted black against the coming dawn—breathing in the cool air of the night. Then Solomon swept out upon the mesa, shadows of brush and rock, dark blots with the rising sun—and rode away into the North.

A FRIENDLY CAMP-FIRE

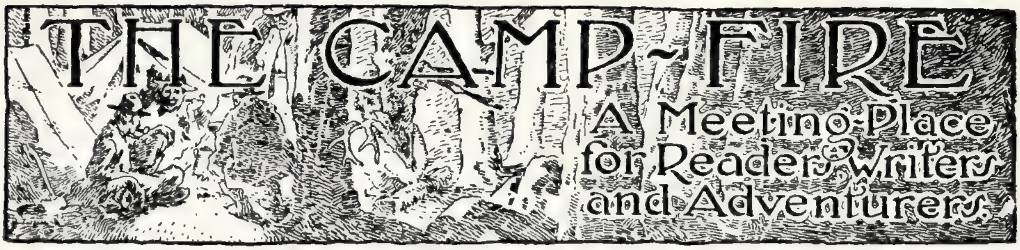
by Benton M. Stanton

IF YOU'VE never left a cow-camp
In the evenin' through the snow
On a stubborn Texas pony, 'thout a cent,
And not knowin' jest perzackly
Which a-way you orter go,
But so mad you didn't care which way you went;

If you've never rode five days, sir,
'Thout a bite o' bread to eat——
On'y eatin' roasted rabbit once a day;
If you do not know the taste, sir,
Of unsalted, hairy meat,
And have never had your hawse to break away,

Leavin' you upon th' prairie
Sixty miles from anywhere
With yore blanket tied upon th' saddle horn,
And a norther comin' toward ye
At the rate of sixty per—
Makin' you b'gin t' wish ye wasn't born;

If you've never trudged along, sir,
With yore hopes a-sinkin' low,
And th' hunger gnawin' clean into yore brain—
You don't know jest what it means, sir,
To look out across the snow
And behold a friendly camp-fire on the plain.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

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COMRADE McDonald's suggestion that Camp-Fire equip and send out an expedition of its own met with a response that makes it look as if things were going to happen! At this writing the returns are only partly in. I'd rather expected a good many, though for small amounts, but, while there may in the end be as many as I expected, the amounts average far larger than I dreamed.

It is too important a matter to be settled until there has been full discussion by all of you who wish, so far as our space permits. Most of those already heard from have given us valuable suggestions and to the greatest extent possible I'm going to print them so all of us can think them over. We'd better take the time in the beginning so that when we do start we can start right.

When all opinions are in, some one will have to make final decision on various points and give the undertaking definite and final shape. I can't see how we could get a general vote on it without preparing a very long ballot and waiting quite a while to get returns. If any of you (remembering that our magazine can't print anything inside of two or three months after receipt), can work out a satisfactory voting method, go to it, for a vote is the best way.

FAILING a vote, I suggest the following names from which to choose a *temporary* executive committee to decide on the final shaping of the plan as nearly as possible in accordance with the general expression of opinion from those of you who write in: Edgar Young, Talbot Mundy, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Harold Lamb, Arthur O. Friel, John Held, Jr. All live in or near New York City and can meet to talk things over. All are Camp-Fire members, all but Mr. Held belong to our writers' brigade and he painted our mid-August cover, is known to you by general reputation and has been tremendously interested in this idea from the first, having had some valuable experience along these lines. If you want to add any of us in the office, or any other Camp-Fire members who can meet with the others in New York, all right.

A committee selected from these names can give the final shaping and turn over the campaign to whatever permanent executives the consensus of your opinion calls for.

When you have read the following letters and those kept for the next issues I think you will agree that the prospects for our expedition look very bright indeed. If I don't sound enthusiastic it is because I'm trying hard not to appear too much so. I'm strong for the idea.

FIRST, here is a letter full of interesting suggestions. As to the financial arrangements suggested I'm no judge—out of my line. I've heard, though, that one big New York banking-house is full of Camp-Fire numbers, from its president down. Have forgotten which one, but can find out and will learn from others whether the suggested method of handling funds can be put into operation if Camp-Fire decides on it.

If the rest of you wish, of course we'll make the suggested arrangement for displacing a story with an account of the expedition. Our job in the office is to make the magazine as nearly what you want as we can.

AS TO my being on the committee for handling finances, though I appreciate the suggestion in the following and other letters, there's nothing doing. I can handle some things, but financial matters should be handled by those trained in them, as I am not. Also there is the little matter of my having already stated definitely that I would not undertake this responsibility. I'm sick of politicians and such who finally accept positions they've loudly declined and I don't want to class in with them. Nothing doing. But of course I'll do all I can to help unofficially on the side.

Rochester, Pennsylvania.

I would like to be one of the first to go on record heartily approving an expedition of scientific exploration sponsored by *Adventure* and paid for by us, the readers. I think Mr. McDonald's idea about the best that has originated through Camp-Fire and will do all I can personally to help along the move. After reading carefully what he has to say, and your own suggestions, I think I have an improvement on at least one of the ideas expressed, to wit:

MR. McDONALD suggested $10 contributions, with that amount as the limit. Your suggestion is to make the "shares" $10, but to allow portions of "shares" or "good-will shares" to be distributed among those who might not be able to contribute more than, say, $1. Here is my idea along this line: Make these "shares" with a par of $1, then the $1 contributors can buy one share and the $10 men can have a certificate for 10 shares. This idea came to me as the natural solution to this particular problem, probably because I am and have been for a long time the financial editor of the Pittsburgh *Dispatch*. By putting a par on our shares, you see, we do away with the problem of fractional shares or "good-will" shares. I hate to see the $1 idea carried too far, however, for I'm afraid it soon would result in most of the contributions amounting to only that sum. Try and get the $10 idea across, and I feel that $10 will be as easy to get from the great majority of Camp-Fire as $1.

BY ALL means have the exploration under auspices of some big museum. It then would be conducted along scientific lines with a minimum of wasted effort, time and money and the objective from the start would be more definite. However, I do not favor sending the money to the museum, but rather to "*Adventure's* Fund for the Scientific Exploration of the World," the fund to be held by *Adventure* and expenses of the various expeditions paid out of it as necessary.

I do not favor Mr. McDonald's idea of converting the cash into Canadian and Liberty bonds of the late war, for the simple reason that it does not help the Government now to buy them, and the yield on such issues is negligible when compared with many other bonds. I would suggest, instead, that they who handle this fund put every available dollar of it in tax-exempt municipal bonds of the highest yield to be found. Any of the stock and bond houses in Wall Street whose members belong to the stock exchange there will be glad to lay out a list of such securities, and such houses as I have mentioned could be relied on. Better still, let the National City Bank or the Guaranty Trust Company handle the fund for *Adventure* with the assurance that they use their own good judgment as to investing the money, keeping in mind that it is to be put into securities that can be converted into cash quickly in case it is needed for our work.

I CAN readily understand why you do not wish to head the undertaking (I mean be responsible for the funds sent you), but I think you are the man who should head the committee that will do this. It seems to me that the question of where the money shall be sent is the first item in this big undertaking—and it *is* a big undertaking—that must be settled. We would be foolish to go ahead with other plans if we were not assured of the funds to finance them, therefore why not settle the question of the custodian of the funds *right away?* Could you not steal enough time some afternoon to see either the National City Bank or the Guaranty Trust Company (or any other bank that you might prefer) and arrange with them to accept deposits to the fund, giving proper credits and furnishing you with a daily list of contributions received, thus relieving you of the necessity of actually handling the cash and the clerical work that goes with it?

Then, through *Adventure* or by a circular letter (expenses for same to come out of the funds) apprize us of the arrangements and where to send our checks? Then, after this is done, some one would have to be given authority to draw checks on the fund for expenses. If any of the knockers want to question this method, why, to satisfy them, you could easily place a surety bond, paying for same from the fund, and thus silence any one who might be inclined to criticize. This is merely a suggestion on my part, which being one of many, may lend an idea from which the final plans may be evolved.

WHEN the depository is chosen and the keeper or keepers of the fund are picked, and the necessary authority to draw on the fund has been worked out satisfactorily, then I think your idea of the museum taking active charge of the actual work is the best. The committee having charge of the cash, etc., necessarily should be located in New York. This committee, after the above details have been carried out, should employ the museum to do the actual work of exploration, for a consideration that the museum shall name, the final figures to be changed, of course, if necessary, for it would be humanly impossible to judge to a few dollars what the cost of such a venture would be. The museum which would handle the expedition chosen, then efforts should be made to hurry it along, and it should be conducted in the same painstaking way and in the same dignified manner and with the same lofty ideals as is noted in the National Geographic Society's expeditions. We of course, shall choose where and what we want explored and it should be understood absolutely that it is OUR expedition. With the party should go a photographer and a good, interesting discriptive writer. Personally, I will work till the last dog dies to have these two men included in the party, for reasons which I shall presently state.

NOW, after the fund is raised, those who will handle it chosen and the museum picked and the objective finally decided on, the next thing we have to consider is keeping the readers informed fully of all that is going on. To this end, I make this proposal, and I hope you will take it up with all Camp-Fire readers for a vote (for I feel that a vote will carry my proposal by an overwhelming majority): While the expedition is on, and until it is entirely completed, discontinue one short story per issue of *Adventure* and devote this space instead to an interesting, running account with full details of the expedition, its progress, plans, movements and any other news connected with it. Will you put that proposal up to your readers? I, for one, would prefer the loss of a short story an issue when an account of our own expedition could take the space, but I would hate like the deuce to see "Camp-Fire" cut down a single line in order to keep the stories going and at the same time print news of the venture.

NOW, as to the photographer and writer accompanying the expedition. Here is something I wish you would consider and give Camp-Fire a chance to consider, keeping in mind that it would mean profit for the fund which could apply on future expeditions: Let the photographer take photographs galore, of everything with the slightest interest attached and let the writer keep a detailed account of the journey. When the trip is completed, let at least 500 of the photographs and the running accounts of the expedition be published in a finely bound, well printed volume or volumes, with the names of all contributors to the fund (but not the amount each gives, of course) appended. Let these be published on a subscription basis, so as to assure expenses and a profit on them, and sold to us of Camp-Fire and us who contribute. Personally, I would pay well for such a volume and so would the other readers. And while on the subject, here is another angle: The writer could send back daily by carrier pigeon, wireless, telegraph, cable or courier (or by all combined if necessary) a story of the day's events, which we could syndicate readily to a large number of newspapers at space rates, or on a contract basis. Newspapers would be glad to use such news and it would advertise our expedition wonderfully, besides being a source of good revenue. How about it?

AS TO the contributions, I favor Mr. McDonald's plan over yours, for the following reasons. Mr. McDonald would limit gifts to $10, while you seem to favor no limit and an honor roll for those who contribute the largest sums. Now, here is why I think Mr. McDonald's plan best: Scores, if not hundreds of Camp-Fire readers, would contribute probably a thousand if they had it. Many, to doubt, will, if no limit is on the gifts, give from $50 to as high as $500, or maybe more. But will the spirit of those who are fortunate enough to give large sums exceed that of those who can give no more than $10 or $1? I think not. An honor roll for big contributors, therefore, would only emphasize the difference in bank rolls, and not in the heart that sends the money. To my mind, the reader who will send in $1 because that is all he can spare, is entitled to as much glory as the man in better circumstances who may send in a thousand. I think you get the drift of my idea, so that's that. *Adventure*, of course, not being an individual, could raise the limit for its own gift, the same as any other institution that might choose to help along the good work. Personally, I have in mind at least five in Pittsburg who would, I am sure, contribute not less than $5,000 or more if solicited. My limit idea applies only to individuals. Let an honor roll be formed, if need be, for corporation or institution gifts, but NOT for individual gifts. Instead if you want to spare the space, simply print the names of the contributors—all of them—and how much they give, without setting apart the larger gifts.

NOW, as to the objective of the expedition, where shall it be? Why not print a ballot in Camp-Fire with the names of at least a dozen out of the way and strange places, printed thereon and allow us to vote? The larger vote of course, designating the objective. For instance, there is a legend among newspapermen, and I think, elsewhere that there is an island in the West Indies group on which no one but women live. That would be an interesting (not meaning anything flippant) place to know about. And there are the Andes Mountains and the Moloate of Samoa, and the interiors of South

America, and Africa, and the Never-Never of Australia, and the northermost reaches of Canada, etc. I think it would be a good idea to have some big museum prepare a list of little known, unexplored places, and from that list have the ballot compiled so we can vote. Eliminate, of course, anything pertaining to either of the polar regions.

I certainly am hoping you will put one or two of my ideas up to the readers for a vote, not that I am trying to dominate any feature of this plan, but simply because I truthfully think they would favor the ideas in question. At any rate, I hope there will be something somewhere in this letter which may help you and Camp-Fire to arrange final plans. Anything I can do to help, why just let me know. As to a contribution, count me in for not less than $10, and if the final decision is no limit, then put me down for $50. If there is any correspondence or clerical work which I might help you out in, shoot it along and I'll guarantee to attend to it *muy pronto* and shoot it back quickly.

Yours to make our venture successful.

—MARSHALL R. HALL.

Certainly both the above and the following are more democratic than the plan I offered, and therefore better in that respect. But I believe any such undertaking is going to need the financial support of those who happen to be better equipped with the needful or happen to be more enthusiastic than others. Also, why shouldn't every one be allowed to contribute according to his means? I withdraw my suggestion of an "honor roll" for those giving more than the usual amount. I'm sorry I made it. Any "honor" concerned is due those who give most in proportion to their means and of course there is no way of measuring that. A poor man's dollar may be a bigger gift than a rich man's hundred.

How would it do, if any names at all are published, not to name the amounts given? Or to express our general thanks to those who had helped us beyond the designated amount, giving their names but not the amounts? I'm just asking.

Meanwhile I'm leaving the amounts named in letters received because it is of course necessary that all of you should know just how strong is the response and the general prospect of financial backing. I've already stated that the publishers of our magazine are ready to contribute their substantial mite if desired.

Halifax, Nova Scotia.

My first letter, though I have read the magazine since its birth.

I want to register my approval of your ideas of an *Adventure* expedition in the interests of science. The original plan, even though successful, is more or less ephemeral in its character, benefiting only those directly interested, but the plan of a scientific basis is broader, more lasting and more in the character of a permanent monument to every one who is engaged in it even remotely.

As to the shares, limit each holder to one, whatever the price. An "Adventurer" may be very proud to own one until he runs across a plutocrat with a few dozen in his possession when his spirit will visibly shrink, which is not conductive to brotherly love. With greetings, I am—H. M. ROSENBERG.

A sample of the general indorsements already received:

Philadelphia.

Regarding "Canada's" proposition for *Adventure's* own company, I just want to say that my ten dollars are ready and awaiting call. Let's hear more of it in Camp-Fire columns.—RALLEN SNYDER.

In commenting on these letters I'm not trying to settle things for the rest of you. But on certain points I can advance phases not allowed for in the letters or that ought to be considered, particularly as to the magazine itself. For example, the coupon printed in our magazine for voting of any kind is subject to certain post-office regulations and also does not seem of practical value here. None of you could vote until it had been published and that means a wait of several months after the coupon has been decided upon. Without a coupon any of you can write in or come in and vote on any phase at any time. And, as you'll see on reading all the letters, many questions are going to be involved and a coupon would have to be a very large and complicated affair.

I agree with the following letter that our expedition should be in no way a money-making plan. If, however, it should chance that some money were made, say through motion-picture rights, there should be some plan for dividing it among contributors or devoting it to some other undertaking for Camp-Fire, even if the sum realized were only a small part of the cost.

Chicago.

The main idea is fine dope but needs careful handling in order to insure success and prevent a general knockdown and drag-out among our members.

WHY NOT send the expedition to the region Friel writes about—the Amazon country? There must be adventure to be had still along the Jurua and the Javary. Take along a moving-picture man with the understanding that *Adventure* is to be furnished with plenty of "stills" to be published later. Printed reports are all well enough but there's nothing like pictures to get the real facts home to your readers. Reports should be rendered in plain every-day English—snappy, interesting stuff that we can all grasp.

Cut out all idea of "investment" or returns of any sort, put everybody interested on the same basis with the understanding that they pay the same as every one else and get their reward in the reports from the expedition and the pictures. This may be objected to on the ground that everybody who happens to buy a copy of the magazine will get the benefit whether they contributed to the expedition or not. This could be got around by publishing a special supplement for the benefit of contributors only, but a large number of your readers are not on the subscription list and (like myself) buy their copy wherever they happen to be.

WITH wages declining and the general tightening up you will get more contributors at $1 a shot than you will at $5 or $10. I have no idea how many members we have who would contribute, but if there are 25,000 who would put up even $1 each, that ought to start the thing. What I don't know about the cost of such expeditions is plenty, but should say that sum would get things going.

You might get a vote on the matter by inserting a coupon in *Adventure* asking those interested to say that they would contribute (if called on), where the expedition should go, etc., and then strike an average on the replies.

As to who should go, I pass. But would say men of experience in and knowledge of the region selected and who are of the caliber to carry the thing through and get results.—G. E. STRICKLAND.

Space prevents publishing any more of the letters in this issue, so the rest will follow later. If you have any suggestion to make, send it in. That's probably the nearest we can come to a general vote, but everybody is invited to say his say and we'll do the best we can to work out a plan that will meet the approval of the majority.

I'd like to add that John Held, Jr., suggests Easter Island for archeological exploration. Most of you have heard of this Pacific island's wonderful ruins left by an unknown race, and Mr. Held tells me only one scientific expedition has ever been sent there.

CONCERNING his story in this issue a few words from E. O. Foster:

Bunduk nang Kao, the Mountain of the Snake, lies near Los Banos on the Laguna de Bay a short distance from Manila. The Katipunan Society was a secret Filipino order, organized during the time of the Spanish occupation of the islands. At one time nearly every Tagalog was a member. Its rites were barbarous, but with a certain glittering splendor which appealed to the native imagination.

The songs quoted are, as near as I can remember, correct. The following glossary may aid the reader if he desires to translate them: Dahun Kao, King snake; Ay yoco say yo, I do not like you; patay, kill; bejuca, rattan; halika, come here; masama, bad, wicked; iglesa, church.

BUNDUK NANG KAO, mentioned in "Shattered Altars," lies to the East of Los Banos. It is higher than the surrounding territory, is reputed, as all deep lakes are, to have no bottom, and although only slightly above the temperature of the Laguna de Bay, a half-mile away, its waters are slightly warmer. Los Banos stands on volcanic rock, and near it are a series of underground vapor baths cut from the lava, the steam arising from some subterranean source. The big snake of the Katipunan rites is said to inhabit its oily waters, and forty feet is the lowest estimate any native will put on the length of the scaly monster. A large female python, captive in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, incubated her eggs in the manner described in the story.—E. O. FOSTER.

TEN YEARS ago, back in 1911, at my request Frederick Ferdinand Moore sent me some dope about himself for Camp-Fire. Probably it arrived too late to run along with his first story in our magazine; anyhow I found it today and here it is, to go along with the "The Picture" in this issue. He wrote it in the third person for me to doctor as I liked, but it's not doctored any. Now it's up to Mr. Moore to tell us what's been happening to him during the ten years since then.

Frederick Ferdinand Moore is another writer who has lived many of the adventures he writes in fiction form. Mention Malta and he will tell you about the catacombs, speak of Singapore and he will ask about Raffles Square. He knows the docks at Durban as well as the water-front of San Francisco or Manila. He took Port Said apart and put it together, and as a soldier, sailor and war correspondent he looked this old world over—and liked it. He's barely in the thirties, too, and isn't done rambling yet, either.

HE STARTED when he was sixteen, by shipping out of Boston in a cattle steamer for Liverpool, and wound up by girdling the globe. He got back with a sugar bag for a wardrobe, and as soon as he got another pair of trousers set out again.

He rode in exhibition in Madison Square Garden with a crack troop of United States cavalry, served in the Philippines and has seen fighting under three flags. He has done his trick at the wheel in a "square rigger" and helped run banana boats to the West Indies—not always with cargoes of bananas.

He hunted bandits in the Philippines with a flying column of cavalry as a correspondent, chased the Baltic fleet in the China Sea and romped over a good part of the Orient. He spent ten years of his life hunting trouble—and men. He was shanghaied in a whaler, and has had a couple of foreign commands and knows of the big ones in more than one army. When he writes adventure stories he knows something about the way things happen and how fighting men work and play.

HERE is something to take hold of. God knows there is need of such men and of such an organization, in peace even more than in war. Those whom Mr. Wood wants to get hold of first are the members of the original American Legion, started by our magazine back in 1914 and 1915, but if you are the kind of American who sees the need of an active campaign against the evils that threaten real democracy in this country, against the graft and other corruption that are rotting our democratic institutions, send your name to Mr. Wood, even if you were not an old Legioner, and join yourself to the other Americans who are willing to *do* something instead of merely grumble.

To those of you who read "Looking Ahead for Democracy," referred to by Mr. Wood, there is no need to give assurance that no revolutionary methods are involved and that whatever ends are attained will be attained by the lawful exercise of the fundamental power that lies in the people themselves.

IN WHAT Mr. Wood says about the present American Legion it is to be understood that his complaint is not against the Legion as a whole but against an element in it that has at least been making itself heard. Their claim that our old Legion had nothing to do with their origin is true in a sense. In another sense, they will find that very prominent among their originators were members of our old Legion. They will also find it officially recorded in their own archives that their name was formally transferred to them, at their request, by our old Legion.

As the old Legion has been legally disincorporated, I can see no objection to Mr. Wood and his associates using the old emblem for their new organization. Who has a better right to it than the old members themselves?

You Canadian comrades at Camp-Fire, your country needs an organization of this kind about as much as ours does. Are some of you ready to start a similar movement?

1411 North La Salle St.
Chicago, Ill.

I am writing you at the request of numerous members of the *old* American Legion, men who were affiliated both with the Chicago Division and men who belonged to the Legion in other parts of the country, and who are asking us to do something toward organization of a *real* patriotic organization that will DO things.

WITHOUT throwing any bricks at any one, and having been in attendance at several Legion meetings lately, at which the prevailing idea seemed to be that the Legion should get a bonus for every "hero by request," I am heartily disgusted with the prevailing attitude of the men, and long for the comradeship of *real* patriots who, like the Spanish-American veterans, came home and kept quiet about their heroic deeds. To hear some of these "heroes" that never got to the seacoast you would think they expected a medal every day, a soft job with nothing to do but draw their breath, and a private banker to hand them twenty-dollar bills every now and then.

The Legion men are also busily denying that our old crowd had anything whatsoever to do with its origin. They claim that ours was only a political organization, and refuse to recognize the fact that *our* men composed the LaFayette Escadrille, etc. In fact they deny *in toto* everything of which we are proud, and it hurts.

FOR these reasons *our* men want to re-establish the *old* organization, with its original objects and with its glorious record of individual achievement. And for that reason I am requesting you to insert a call of some kind in *Adventure* asking our *old* men to send their names and addresses to me, so that I may send them a few of our plans on the matter. We have had a meeting already at which quite a large gathering was present, and we are now waiting your answer before going ahead with our plans. We have a live bunch here who are willing to give both time and money to the furtherance of this organization, and we believe the other men all over the country will go along with us if they are given the chance. Of course we can not use the old name, as that is no longer ours, but as the American Legion failed to take our old emblem, adopting in its stead one that is hard to distinguish from numerous other societies, we feel that there could be no objection by any one to our using the *old* emblem.

And the old emblem is *really* American. As our new organization would not be anxious to make money, we could get these emblems cheap and sell them to our members at nearly cost, or for 25 cents, as the old organization did.

WE BELIEVE this reorganization offers an opportunity for patriots to do some constructive work for our country along the lines suggested in the series of articles "Looking Ahead for Democracy," and it might even develop in time into a great force for good government in this country of ours.

By the way, we have not thought of a name for the new-old society. Suggestions on this will also be appreciated.—FREDERIC T. O. WOOD, M. E.

CONCERNING his novelette in this issue E. S. Pladwell writes us as follows—a most interesting point of view on U. S. Grant:

Oakland, California.

The main character is based on Grant's, although there is no attempt to portray the real history of the man. Incidentally, the Arizona range trouble to which I refer had no such person as *Grant Wilcox* to handle it. Perhaps things would have been better if it had.

AS THE result of my own readings into the history of the Civil War period, I would advise every man to study the career of the great-hearted, strong-minded, bone-headed American, Ulysses Grant, part boob, part genius, and all plain horse-sense.

Here is a triumph of the mediocre. Every person who is not a genius can study it and renew his hopes and aspirations. Here is the glory of a sloppy subaltern, a luckless farmer, a miserable real-estate agent, a poor bill-collector, a rotten bad clerk in a hide and leather store, and a man who resigned from the Army when about to be cashiered for drunkenness.

This is the man who later became General-in-Chief of the Army and twice President of the United States.

Can you beat it? There is no such come-back in history. And perhaps some poor devil who is down and out can study this man's career as a fine example of what might happen to a man who refuses to be beaten. I'm not a preacher but I think the career of Grant affords the best lesson in American history or any other. His career was a grand succession of bone-head plays, but his courage and tenacity atoned for them all.

THE LOCATION of the story is fictional, in so far as I have been able to make it. There is much fact in the story but naturally I have blurred the facts as much as possible. The map itself is open to criticism, as an expert topographer could tear it to pieces and could easily show where my drawing technique has erred in depicting several contours; but I plead that I am out of practise and fervently hope that but few expert topographers will take the time to study it too keenly. Perhaps if you reduce it small enough the errors will adjust themselves.—E. S. PLADWELL.

AS AN example of what is possible for our Camp-Fire Stations in the cities and, on a smaller but equally interesting scale, in smaller places, have a look into one of the little printed booklets or bulletins issued periodically to its members by the Adventurers' Club of Chicago. Except that the New York Adventurers' Club has not yet secured a permanent club-house and confines its activities to monthly dinners, it, the first to be organized, operates on similar lines and I can testify to the unique interest of its meetings.

The fundamental ideas embodied here are possible of application anywhere that a group of adventurous spirits can be gathered together. And a Station has a tremendous advantage over an organization like the Adventurers' Club, for it has a permanent nucleus to build around. Years ago there were Adventurers' Clubs in Montreal, Nogales, El Paso and other places. All were successful, but only temporarily. The trouble was that their members went wandering off after new adventures and, with no permanent rallying-point, only two of the chapters were able to survive the critical first stages and emerge as strong, self-sustaining bodies, growing stronger every year. Our Stations are free from this big handicap. No matter how many members go adventuring, the nucleus and rallying-point remains, drawing to it automatically new members. Also, our Stations have the big help of our magazine and Camp-Fire, being made known to hundreds of thousands of adventurers instead of having to go on a hunt for them.

YET a Station, of course, is entirely its own master and can shape its own destiny as freely as any Adventurers' Club. Its local organization and growth is entirely a matter to be shaped and controlled by itself.

Why not gather two or three congenial adventurers in your home town or city, hang out a Station sign, get listed in our magazine and, if you like, get local publicity in order to attract the attention of other adventurers in your general locality whom you have not met? Local publicity is easy to get, for the formation of a local club of adventurers is a legitimate and very good item of news. Of course you need not include the magazine in your publicity work, for if you do, your news item becomes tinged with advertising and a newspaper will probably turn its back in that case. I can't make it too plain, anyhow, that in starting or maintaining a Station or club you are not expected to do any advertising of this magazine. The "dope" on Stations and the list of those now in operation are given at intervals in the magazine, but our magazine serves chiefly as a string for tying them all together and as a sort of "official" organ and bulletin.

Here is the matter concerning the Adventurers' Club of Chicago:

WHAT IS THE ADVENTURERS' CLUB?

The Adventurers' Club is the home of those "who have left the beaten track and have made for adventure." The man who loves the great outdoors, who feels the call of the woods, the sea, or the mountains, and who knows how to answer that call; the man who leaves civilization behind him and for weeks and months breaks new trails; the explorer and big game hunter; the engineer and miner, the newspaper correspondent and the military man who has seen unusual service; these are men of the type who make up the membership of this unique organization.

Two things immediately impress the visitor to the club rooms. First, the all-pervading spirit of cordiality and good-fellowship; second, the trophies which cover the walls. Elephant, antelope and deer heads vie in interest with pictures and relics from the little known peoples of the Amazon, Africa and the Philippines, while an old whaling gun and weapons from all periods threaten you from various angles.

It is in these surroundings that the members gather each day for lunch, for a social chat or to meet and listen to men of international reputation who are often guests of the club. The following list of men who have spoken before the club in the past few months will give some idea why the Adventurers' is known as the most interesting organization in the city.

Major General Leonard Wood, "Present Day Problems." John Bass, newspaper correspondent, "Conditions in Central Europe." Carl E. Akeley, big game hunter, "Elephant Hunting." Dr. Frederick Monsen, explorer, "Mexico." Alanson Skinner, explorer, "To Hudson Bay by Canoe." Dr. W. T. Grenfell, medical missionary to Labrador, "Labrador." Everett Brown, Olympic Games Committee, "With American Athletes in Belgium." Col. Henry J. Reilly, commander Reilly's Bucks, "Recent Experiences on the Polish Fronts." Captain F. J. Franklin, O. B. E., "With the British Forces in Arctic North Russia." Robert H. Becker, explorer and naturalist, "The Peruvian Andes and the Upper Amazon." Major George Lee, "Frontier Days in the Army." William T. Kopplin, traveler and artist, "The Indians of the Southwest." Dr. Fay Cooper Cole, explorer, "The Pygmies of the Philippines." Dr. R. A. Griffith, big game hunter, "Recent Hunting Experiences in Alaska." Lieut. Meyer Morton, U. S. Balloon Service, "Keeping Tab on the Boche from a Balloon." Col. T. A. Siqueland, U. S. Secret Service in Scandinavia, "European Conditions," and films of German submarines sinking twenty-one allied ships. Dr. F. M. Woodruff, naturalist, "The Wild Life of Our West." Lieut. Nathaniel Rubinkam, former commander Baltic Squadron Torpedo Boat Destroyer, "The Work against the Subs." Dr. William Colledge, member of Stanley African Expedition, "Africa Thirty Years Ago." L. O. Armstrong, railway explorer, "From Labrador to Alaska." Lewis Convis, "Ten Thousand Mile Flight from the Bolsheviki." Ted Brown, cartoonist, "Adventure via the Crayon." Prof. J. J. Zmrhal, adviser to Czecho-Slovakian Government, "The Czecho-Slav Republic." Howard Blansford, world adventurer, "Experiences in South American Revolutions." Dick Little, newspaper correspondent, "In Bolshevik Russia." Stanley Graham, big game hunter, "Lassoing Wild Mountain Lions in Mexico" movies. A. R. Nycl, editor Tokyo newspaper, "The Real Japan." Opie Read, novelist, "Human Nature." Rustom Rustomjee, editor *Oriental Magazine*, Bombay, "India in Ferment." Harvey Sconce, big game hunter, "Big Game Hunting in Wyoming." Sir Philip Gibbs, "The United States and World Conditions."

The Adventurers' Club—A Cosmopolitan Organization

Adventure may come to a man in any profession, in any walk of life. The Adventurers' Club of Chicago is proof of this statement as in its membership are found redblooded men in a variety of professions ranging all the way from the ministry to interior decorating.

At a noonday luncheon of the Club you will see the cosmopolitan character of the Club well illustrated. Seated around the big table in homelike, family style will be found a minister who has penetrated the heart of Africa, fraternizing with an ex-soldier who has been cited for bravery, a scientist from the Field Museum, an Englishman who has adventured in the out-of-way places in many countries, a business man who is also Chicago's greatest muskellunge fisherman, a bond salesman who is an authority on moose hunting, an engineer-inventor, one of the founders of the Club, a banker who has decorations from several foreign countries—yes, even an interior decorator who lassos wild lions for the love of adventure.

Adventure, the lure of going to unusual places for unusual reasons, the call of the outdoors, the love of the trail and the camp-fire, has brought these men of varying tastes, professions and experiences together, providing a unique cosmopolitan atmosphere and welding all with a comradeship and fellowship that no other club can boast of.

Wanted, A Man for Trip to India

The following is posted on the bulletin board at the club rooms

"Wanted—A man who will go to India within the next 30 days. Fare paid, first class, and $20 per week salary while en route and for one week after landing, and necessary incidental expenses. Must pay own way back. Duty, to take over and deliver to Indian government a demented Hindu. Indian mufty outfit will be provided. Apply to Captain F. J. Franklin at club."

Here is a great opportunity for some adventurer.

A Brief History

The Adventurers' Club was organized in the early part of 1913 in the rooms of the Chicago Press Club by ten men who had heard the call of the wild and had "left the beaten path and made for adventure." Of the ten, five were war correspondents, three soldiers, one an explorer and one a big game hunter.

For the first two years the club had no regular quarters, but as many of the members were also members of the Press Club the rooms of that club were used as a gathering place and the monthly dinner was for a time held there. Later the dinners were held at Saint Hubert's Grill and for a time at the Lumbermen's Exchange on La Salle Street. In 1915 a part of the second floor of the Press Club building was secured and club rooms fitted up and the noonday luncheons were inaugurated which have continued ever since to be one of the most successful and pleasant features of the club. The lease expiring in May, 1920, it became necessary to secure other quarters. A five-year lease at a very low rental was secured at the present location of the three upper floors and the second and fourth floors subleased to other clubs.

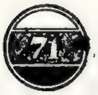
The Adventurers' Club has a most enviable record of service during the war. At the close of the war sixty-two per cent. of the members were wearing Uncle Sam's uniform or that of the Allies, while a number of the members not actually in uniform were giving their whole time to war work. It was really during this war period that the club proved its right to survive. The dues of the soldier members were remitted during the period of service, and a club with a less loyal spirit would have gone to the wall. However, those not in service assumed the full financial burden and kept the club going until the war was over. It is now felt that the club, having passed through the early struggles successfully, is on a firm foundation and its future assured.

The constitution provides for a membership of two hundred resident and non-resident, an army and navy membership composed of men in the regular service residing temporarily in Chicago who pay one-half the regular dues but no initiation, and an honorary membership limited to ten members. There are service members residing temporarily in Chicago who pay the regular dues but no initiation, and an honorary membership limited to ten members. There are about forty non-resident members. These are composed of former active members. The dues of this membership are merely nominal.

In the early days of the club a year book was published and it is the intention of the club officials to get out another during the present year. However, it is a task of some magnitude and the present edition of the Bulletin is intended to answer in a way temporarily the purpose of a year book. Elsewhere is given a list of the members, active and honorary, and a list of deceased members.

BELOW is an outline of the Station idea for the benefit of those who would like to extend this friendly service to the wanderers who come their way. A list of the Stations at present in operation also follows. They are spread well over the map but there is room for plenty more. No limit to the number of Stations that may be started in any one district.

Address correspondence regarding Stations to J. Cox.



A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and provide and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

No. 50—ALABAMA—Birmingham. Percy E. Coleman, 2804 Tennessee Ave.

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No. 61— Burlington. Judge B. N. Alberson, Fairhaven Ave.
No. 7— La Conner. Ed. L. Carson.
No. 71— Charleston. Elmer E. McLean, Box 561.

No. 48—WEST VIRGINIA—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.

No. 41—WISCONSIN—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9, Tenny Bldg.
No. 5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle Street.
No. 72—Kenosha. Leland Birchard, 304 Marion Ave.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Homer Irving McEldowney rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Champaign, Illinois.

I'll say that I'm twenty-one, and you'll know there's little to tell. I enlisted in April of '17—U. S. Cavalry—and was shanghaied to the Border where I remained till the fracas was over. It looked very much like two years out of my life simply wasted, but it did three things, possibly more. I learned something of men and horses, and I learned to love the Open.

THE outfit was made up almost entirely of old-timers, men from practically every walk of life. Tailors, plumbers, teamsters, cooks, a parson, a teacher, an ex-pugilist, clerks, salesmen, and a couple of "ridge-runners," moonshiners from Kentucky, wanted on the "outside" by the sheriff. They were a mighty interesting lot, and under their hides they were more or less white, the kind you can depend upon in a pinch. They'd share a blanket or a last canteen-check. They were as different as day and night, but they were friends, and friends worth while.

A year from now, if it's the will of the gods, I complete my work at the University of Illinois. Then I hope to begin my education. Whether it's a cattle boat, a horse shipment, or work in a galley, doesn't greatly matter—as you say, "The spirit of adventure lives in all men"—and it's very much alive in me. I'm going to travel, if I bust a trace.

I received your check from *Adventure* and wish to thank you for it. It will enable me to take in some of the wonders of the Yellowstone and to view the blue Pacific, before the fall "grind" begins at Champaign. If I have a rip-snorting good time, I shall credit it to *Adventure*.

THE rough sketch of the country is accurate so far as topography is concerned. Only the ranches, the towns Gila and Sleepy Junction, and Solomon Valley are imaginary.

Worthington's trail down through Mexico had to be guess-work on my part, doped out with the aid of a surface map, for while I am fairly familiar with the country on this side of the Border, country which I patrolled while on outpost duty with the Seventeenth U. S. Cavalry, I have never been more than a mile or two into Old Mexico.

I might say in passing that the old cowman and pioneer, described by Mr. Bechdolt in *Adventure*, was a familiar figure to some sixteen of us who were stationed at Slaughter's Ranch for six weeks or two months. The old gentleman, John Slaughter, would ride out early and return late, covering miles and miles between sun-up and dusk, always astride the same little roan pony, with a well worn stock saddle, and a pearl-handled "six gun" hung at the horn. But in spite of his record in the early lawless days, we found him wholly human—and the canned peaches and Carnation milk that came across his counter in the little general store, were the best in the land. It was, then, with more than ordinary interest and pleasure that I read the article—and saw again the old cowman whom we had learned to know, back in the days before the Armistice.

—HOMER I. MCELDOWNEY.

MANY readers took advantage of our offer to sell used *Adventure* cover paintings at the auction by mail that was closed July 1st. The next auction date is January 1st, 1922. Send in your bids at any time before that date for the cover paintings for issues up to that of January 30th, out December 30. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover will be considered. Bid for as many covers as you like. It is best to name second and third choices in case the cover or covers you particularly want get a higher bid from some one else.

And don't forget that *Adventure* is now published three times a month. The 10th, 20th and 30th are the dates, with due allowance for February.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: First March, 1919; Feb., 1916; May, Oct., 1915 and any copy before 1915 for five cents each.—Address RICHARD ZORN, North Baltimore, Ohio.

WILL SELL: Oct., 1912; Dec., 1914; Dec., 1915; April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Dec., 1916. From Feb., 1917 to date. All issues prior to 1918 twenty-five cents each; all others twenty cents each, post-paid.—Address CHARLIE E. DOUGLAS, Spencer, West Virginia, R. F. D. 1.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

In their homes or shops some members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to—maintain Stations where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1508 Columbia St., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next department.*)

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure.* The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Saugatuck, Mich. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

13. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern Ungava

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✠(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

14. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

15. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, La Conner, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

20. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

26. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 5444 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), care *Adventure*. Petrograd and its province, Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

30. Africa Part 2 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. Africa Part 3 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

32. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East Africa
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

33. ★ Africa Part 5 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. *(Postage 12 cents.)*

34. Africa Part 6 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

35. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. *(Postage 8 cents.)*

36. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

37. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. *(Postage 5 cents.)*

WEAPONS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers ammunition and edged weasons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers including foreign and American makes. D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents and in Mr. Beadle's 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

Canoeing the Ottawa's Headwaters

FROM there this inquirer wants to hit the St. Lawrence, thus laying out an itinerary that Mr. Moore has found it some job to fill in. A beautiful trip, and well worth taking—if not in 1921, then in 1922:

Question:—"Another young fellow and myself are planning a canoe-trip from the headwaters of the Ottawa during the months of July, August and September.

We would like to get all the information about how near the headwaters of the river a canoe and equipment can be sent, how is the climate during these months, what in your opinion is the best equipment for a trip of this kind, also any information that would be of help.

We also plan provided we reach the St. Lawrence in September or October to ship the canoe to the headwaters of Lake Champlain coming by canal to the Hudson and thence by rail to Washington."—HAROLD GRAY, Washington, D. C.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—The nearest you can get to the headwaters of the Ottawa River by rail is at Haileybury—Lake Temiskaming. Take the C. P. R. from Ottawa to North Bay: the T. & N. O. from North Bay to Haileybury.

The Ottawa, which has an estimated length of six hundred and eighty-five miles, has its source northeast of Lake Temiskaming, in the upper parts of the Province of Quebec. There is a canoe-route from Temiskaming northeast and north across the Height of Land to Lake Abitibi, but it might be more ground than you could possibly cover in three months.

Your best plan would appear to me to go to Haileybury by rail, secure your supplies, and, entering Lake Temiskaming, descend the Ottawa. You'll find the climate in July, August and September just about right for such an outing. Expect warm days with cool nights, a changing atmosphere to cooler as September comes to an end.

About equipment. You'll need a good waterproof tent. I wouldn't carry a very big one, because you will have to get along with as little luggage as possible on such a long trip. Take a small hand ax, heavy blankets, a water-proof ground-cloth to sleep on, lots of matches (in a water-proof case) a compass, some good fly and mosquito oil, a medicine-bag with bandages (never know when you are going to have an accident or be under the weather) some good maps of the river route.

Send sixty cents to Mr. J. E. Chalifour, Chief Geographer, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, and ask him for one copy each of the Montreal Sheet, the Ottawa Sheet, the Pembroke Sheet and the North Bay Sheet of the Topographical Survey map. Take those maps, cut off what you do not need, and you will be well away for all the information needed about rapids, waterfalls, portage routes, etc., etc.

Try to do with as few dishes, pots and pans as possible—the point is to save heavy, hard work on the portages. If I were you I'd take clothing for both extremes of weather. I'd be prepared with clothes for quick changes when wet—and take it from me, getting wet is what Sherman said about war, especially if you have no change of garments with you. Take several pairs of socks. Be kind to your feet.

Don't take any fool chances on the rapids—the rapids of the Ottawa have taken their toll of lives.

As regards food supplies. You will be able to buy anything you need at Haileybury. Figure out what you and your friend will eat in a day, make allowance for days that you might be held up with winds or storms, sit down and figure out the distances from one town to another down-river, and supply yourself accordingly. Any of the old-timers around Haileybury will be able to tell you much better than I can the approximate distances from point to point.

You'll find many points of interest along your route. You may come across old Hudson's Bay posts that have gone the way of time. You should see all kinds of wild game and fish. You'll come along pretty waterfalls, roaring cataracts, white-flecked rapids.

You will pass the outlets of several notable rivers —the Du Moine, Black, Coulonge, Gatineau, Petewawa, Madawaska, Lièvre, Mississippi, Rouge, Rideau. You'll see the Des Joachims Rapids—pronounced de swish-aw—and the famous Oiseau Rock —pronounced we-sow—some very fine reading about which you will find enclosed.

All the way down you will have no difficulty finding portage paths, for the Ottawa has been used for years by the fur-traders and later by the lumbermen. Arriving at Ottawa, you will have to pass through the canals at St. Annes, Carillon and Grenville before you will reach the St. Lawrence.

The trip from Lake Temiskaming to the St. Lawrence is about three hundred and fifty miles, which, allowing for bad weather when canoeing is impossible, would make a good ninety-day journey.

I have tried to cover the ground for you, but believe me it is a stupendous task. If there is anything else you want to know, ask me. I'll do everything I can to give you a good start on a trip that is worth a year of your life. SEE AMERICA FIRST should be a motto hung on the walls of every American home alongside "God Bless Our Home," and "What is Home without a Mother?"

Here's best o' luck on your trip, a safe journey, soul-satisfying, healthgiving.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

Hidden Treasures of the Incas

WELL hidden, too; or else it isn't there. Or maybe the searchers weren't smart enough—an assumption which is rather unkind to Mr. Young, who was one of 'em:

Question:—"Could you give me any information on prospecting in the U. S. and hidden treasure in Peru? Any information or prospecting for diamonds in some South American country?—JOS. M. KOCKA, Clairton, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I am attaching a monograph dealing with prospecting. The best portions of the U. S. for this work are in the West. Quite a number of men roam around over California, Arizona, Oregon, Nevada, Colorado, and others of these States looking for minerals. Now and then one of them finds a mine. Others search and search.

Regarding hidden treasure in Peru: When the Spanish conqueror, Pizarro, first found the Inca race living in the tops of the Andes and numbering several million he found them using gold for making household pots and dishes and also using it for ornamental purposes but not for money, as they lived under a communistic system of society. He and his compatriots who followed him sent back many ship-loads of gold to Spain.

In order to exact more gold from the natives he took their king captive and held him for ransom. A room of immense size was filled with gold to the height of a man and a half from the floor. He promised that he would turn the king loose after this, but killed him.

Men who were with Pizarro and who wrote accounts of it say that there were many other pack-trains *en route* to Cajamarca when the news got out that the emperor had been killed, and that they threw what gold they were carrying into lakes or buried it. Many rumors of this have been passed down. There is said to be a chain with links several inches through and of great length that was so disposed of.

Be that as it may, little of the hidden gold has ever been found, and the source of so much gold still remains a mystery as the mother lode has never yet been found. While in Peru I tried to drag some of the small crater lakes for gold, but found them extremely deep in comparison with their surface dimensions.

The Diamantino country of Brazil is the greatest diamond-producing country of South America. These diamonds are of better quality than African diamonds of the same water and bring a better price on the markets. Quite a number of diamonds have been found in British Guiana, but no distinct diamond-bearing region has been unearthed yet.

While at São José dos Campos, Brazil, which is between Rio and São Paulo and not in the known diamond country of Brazil, an old rancher told me he knew a river about sixty miles from there that was full of diamonds. He showed me a water drinking-glass full of crystals which he said were rough diamonds. I was not prepared to make the trip with him and never found a chance to return.

Get booklets from the Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., as follows: "Brazil," "Peru," "Bolivia," "Ecuador," and "Colombia." These will be sent you for 5 cents each.

Ask Adventure service costs you nothing but reply postage.

Duck-Hunting in the Dakotas

IT'S still good, though not what it was, and likely not what it will be if present game restrictions encourage wild life as well as bird-lovers hope:

Question:—"I would like to know of some place in the Dakotas or in eastern Nebraska where there is good duck-shooting.

I would like to know how much it would cost to buy or build a shack and if you have to own the land you build on

Would you also please tell me when the best season is.

Could you also please tell me where a person could go, not too far from here and be reasonably sure of having a chance at a goose?"—J. W. BARRY, Hampton, Ia.

Answer, by Capt. Hanson:—In the Fall of the year there is pretty good duck-hunting in many parts of the Dakotas and eastern Nebraska, and some goose-hunting as well. That is the time when the birds are coming down from the north and passing through to the Gulf.

The open season in South Dakota for ducks and geese is from September 16th to December 31st, inclusive. It is illegal to kill these birds at any other time, and there is no Spring hunting season. A non-resident has to pay a hunting license of twenty-five dollars. Game can not be shipped out of the State, and the bag limit is twenty-five birds per day, while no hunter may have in his possession at one time more than fifty birds.

These figures apply only to aquatic fowl, the season for game birds being from September 16th to October 15th, inclusive, and the bag limit five birds per day.

The numerous prairie lakes extending all over the eastern Dakotas are the best places for ducks and geese. A good many of the smaller ones are posted by the farmers owning them, but there are still many where hunting can be done, and particularly on the larger lakes.

As to building a shack, that is something you would have to arrange with the person owning the land where you wished to camp; he might or might not be willing. The cost of your shack would depend altogether on how many comforts you wanted and how convenient were available materials. A tent, well sheltered and banked, ought to do very well.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Water-Proof Tent-Floor Dressing

A SIMPLE recipe from an old-timer:

Question:—"Is there any real "honest-to-goodness" dressing that can be applied to duck which will keep out water? I wish to use it principally for tent floor. If there is, can I make it any cheaper than I can buy it, and will it retain its usefulness for say a month or six weeks?"—R. D. WILSON, Santa Anita, Cal.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—Soak tent floor in a saturated solution of rain-water and equal parts of pulverized alum and acetate of lead.

If you don't mind it being stiff, soak it in melted paraffin. But this makes it bulky, cracks and is hard to fold.

You can buy Preservo almost as cheap, and it is better.

Golden Godlings of the South Seas

THEY elicit prose poems from those who have money; those who haven't money merely indulge in prose:

Question: "I would like to know something of the Society Islands, Tahiti in particular.

Is English pretty generally spoken there?

How are living conditions compared with here, also living expenses?

What are the natives like? Do they speak any English?

Is there any game there to hunt, also any fresh water fish?

Is the climate healthy? Aso how hot does it get?

About what is the population of the principal city, and what proportion is white?"—A. A. McMary, Independence, Ore.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—Tahiti, the "Paris of the South Pacific," is without a doubt the most beautiful island in all the wide world. Tahitian life is gay and very romantic. In fact this capital of French Oceania is an isle of love, a virgin garden, as it were, for sick-o'-the-world people who desire only to live and let live through what becomes in time one long, long afternoon of sunshine, with the blue trade-surf breaking white on the reef a long way out from shore and the palm-trees talking lazily of all the days to come.

English is spoken in Tahiti, even among many of the natives. Too, this cosmopolitan language will carry one through all the island world, from the Society Islands to the pearl-strewn Paumotus and on out to wild, savage Marquesan valleys.

For one who has money or a means of making money, life in Tahiti is far easier and kinder than it is in this land of ours. I have lived in the best of style in Papeete, Tahiti, on forty dollars a month, and I have gotten by on twenty dollars out in the districts of Tahiti. In the latter I was living native fashion, occupying a Tahitian bungalow and eating (no, it was banqueting on) native fruits and vegetables. Also I was dependent on *Moana*, the deep still sea, for many delicacies. She turned out to be very, very good to me.

What are the natives like? Oh, what are they not like? I found them, these golden godlings and incomparable mermaids of French Oceania, the happiest and the jolliest of laughing playmates. They are children, that's all.

But woe to the white traveler who exhausts his purse! For it is then that the Tahitian, and all his kin, fails to remember of ever having met this unfortunate individual before.

Now and then, once in every hundred years, an instance comes up when the glorious mermaid or the golden godling says to the traveler, "It does not matter if you have no money." But only once in every hundred years, mind you. And always it finds its way into Tahitian history, a story for islanders to tell their offspring in the starshine.

There is any amount of game to shoot on the mountainsides. For isn't Tahiti the land of wild pigs, cattle and chickens? In the streams you will find fresh-water fish to spear.

Tahiti is a very healthy island, with two seasons only, Spring and Summer. The temperature varies from seventy to eighty-six degrees.

The population of Papeete, Tahiti, is about thirty-six hundred. Twenty per cent. of this is white. But, oh, such joyous whites! So free from worry!

What more do you want to know about this happy land? Perhaps I might add that Tahiti and the adjacent islands produce about one-half the vanilla that is used throughout the world every year. And that these islands feed thousands of cows-of-the-South-Pacific, that is, coconut-trees, from which copra (the dried meat of coconuts) is procured. Doesn't this sound interesting?

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing but reply postage.

Squeezing the Trigger

MR. WIGGINS has worked out a new wrinkle in revolver-shooting, which he passes along to you herewith:

Question:—"Will you please give me some advice on revolver-shooting? Just how should a beginner go about learning to shoot a revolver? Am a good rifle shot but somehow or other I don't seem to get the hang of revolver-shooting. Have been using a Colt .41 single-action with a four-and-one-half-inch barrel.

"I know the fault does not lie in the gun as I have seen very accurate shooting done with it. I also know that I do not pull my gun off the object before I shoot—at least think I don't—because I have been watching myself closely. I do not wish to have my name printed in connection with this letter."

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I am under the impression that you are not pulling the trigger in the manner to get the best results.

In order to get the best results, the trigger should be squeezed off gradually, like closing the hand on an orange to squeeze the juice out of it. Hold the revolver lightly in the hand, and gradually tighten up all over the grip, and in so doing the trigger will be pulled so easily and regularly that there will not be the jerking that destroys the aim.

Also, here's another kink that I just worked out on myself: pulling the trigger with the last joint of the finger—the end joint I mean, of course. Don't let any part of the finger touch the side of the revolver-frame, as I find that makes me shoot to one side or the other, just as I happen to exert the most pressure, and it always varies. Have the hand high on the grip, and reach the finger to the trigger without the least touch to the frame, and I think you will find some improvement.

Do you practise snapping the empty gun at a mark? That's a help, I have found. Have some empty shells in the cylinder, or a bit of rubber or oiled leather under the hammer to prevent the jar from breaking the firing-pin.

And I fear that you have a barrel a little too short to find the best shooting of which that gun is capable. I would recommend a length of six or seven and one-half inches for the best work. And always use smokeless powder, and clean the revolver with Nitro-Solvent Oil.

I hope these hints will be of service. If you need any more advice don't fail to ask me any time.

Why Cow-Ponies Stand Without Hitching

READERS of Western fiction often wonder why the hero's mount will stand still when the bridle-reins are thrown over its head and left hanging. Here's how the animal is trained:

Question:—"I would like to know how the cow-ponies are broken to stand with their bridle reins hanging. I like horses and I ride a great deal in Kentucky, as here we have a farm. My favorite saddle mare will stand any place I leave her; but I often ride horses that won't, and it is sometimes a lot of trouble to find a good place to tie them.

Of course you understand what I mean—the bridle-reins hanging straight from the bit to the ground."—L. C. Berrine, Jr., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Three ways of teaching a horse to stand if the reins are dropped over his head. One, by use of a thin rope on under jaw, is painful and should not be used if the others will work.

The second way is to fasten a rope to a halter or hackamore, worn under the bridle, and the rope trailed off on the ground. When horse starts off snub him sharply after saying, "Whoa" twice, unless he minds.

Third—hitch the rope on a pair of hobbles and set the hobbles on his fore ankles. Then when he starts to move off say "Whoa" in a firm tone twice. If he fails to obey, jerk his feet out from under him and throw him on his knees.

Two or three snubbings or throwings will teach a sensible horse to mind. Firmness, combined with kindness is the only way to teach a horse. Patience does the business, where anger ruins the animal.

I have taught a good many horses a good many things. I found the horse willing enough after he got wise to what I wanted, but it sometimes took a lot of showing to make him understand.

Bartholomew, the best trainer of trick horses I ever saw, said the believed he forced Adballah, his trick stallion and four-gaited stage performer, to do the first trick about a million times before the horse got on to the fact that he must do just one thing.

After Abdallah had learned one trick, in six months training, he could master a new one in a few days.

In snubbing the horse to throw him, have the rope trail out back of him, so you jerk his feet back as he tries to plunge along.

Do it on soft ground, where he will not skin his knees.

An Ohio-Mississippi River Tip

TOTAL cost, if you want to make it so, half a dollar a day and the price of the boat.

Question:—"I am interested in making a river trip, starting from Pittsburg and taking the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. Having spent no time on the rivers, my experience is limited, so would be pleased to have the following questions advised upon:

What size boat for three, and equipment?

Average expenditure for such an expedition, especially the price of a boat?

What firm would you recommend in Pittsburg that deals in boats?

What time of the year would be best for trip?

Any game or fish, and what laws are provided for such?

Where could maps be obtained of the rivers and channels?

Will there be any difficulties in passing through the locks?

How would one treat the bite of a moccasin snake?
—Ernest Swanson, Ashtabula, O.

Answer, by M. Spears:—The enclosed slip will give you an idea about tripping the Mississippi and Ohio. You could build a boat for from thirty to one hundred dollars. A very cheap boat with a cabin could be constructed.

River expenses are what you make them. You could go down on corn and bacon, catch fish, and perhaps get by for fifteen cents a meal. You would better figure on a dollar a day each, and that'll give you ample funds.

I'd suggest that you build the boat yourselves, having a carpenter help you—one that is used to building boats. Point Pleasant, I think, is the chief boat-building town on the Ohio—all sizes and kinds. You could start in a skiff, and pick a shanty-boat up on the way down.

For Ohio River, early September to start—nearly a thousand miles down. Another thousand from Cairo down the Mississippi.

State Game Laws, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

The pools on the Ohio are long and little current. You'll have to row down these. An outboard motor or small launch would tow you down cheaply. Sell launch at end of trip. Boat brings its cost as far down probably as Vicksburg.

For snake-bite. Bind the limb above the wound with a rope or anything to impede circulation. Open wound with a knife—incisions. Bleed very freely. Work down the limb to the wound with a bandage to force out blood. Apply one per cent. solution of permanganate of potash; or bleaching-powder, calcium hydrochlorite, or Gondy's fluid.

Don't leave the binding on more than half an hour. Then remove, let circulate for a few minutes and put on again, to slow down absorption of poison if any left in wound.

DON'T drink liquor in any form. A little stimulant may be used—aromatic spirits of ammonia, strong coffee, etc. But the best way is clear out the poison. But you're not apt to see snakes except in hot weather.

"I. D. B."

SOMETHING about a crime which seems to be peculiar to South Africa:

Question:—"Can you help a few Camp-Fire fellows out with some information?

In South Africa a man commits a crime, and as a punishment is branded with the three letters I. D. B. written after his name.

What is the crime, and what is the meaning of the three initials?"—M. Hains, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—The three letters stand for "Illicit Diamond Buying." Diamonds in the rough must be taken at once when found to a mining commissioner's office and registered. No one is allowed to own a rough diamond in South Africa unless it is registered.

In the old days in the 80's one could sell rough diamonds in the Orange Free State, and a great trade was carried on in smuggling diamonds across the border from Cape Colony to the Orange Free State. Once across the border, the smuggler was immune from arrest. These diamonds were purchased from employees in the mines illicitly; hence the phrase illicit diamond buyer or "I. D. B."

The penalty is still very severe, and if you are caught with diamonds obtained illicitly the penalty is seven years on the breakwater at Cape Town. "I. D. B." is still carried on to this day. If you *see* a man with rough diamonds and do not report it you are liable to a long term of prison even if you do not possess them yourself.

Lots of millionaires in S. A. made the nucleus of their fortunes out of "I. D. B." but were not caught at it. One of the most notorious I. D. B. operators used the chief of police of Kimberley to take a quantity of uncut diamonds across the border. He invited the chief of police for a hunting-trip and had the cartridges loaded with diamonds. Once across the border, he showed these cartridges to his guest, who could not then arrest him.

I have written some stories on I. D. B. and if you care to call at my office at 8 S. Dearborn I will show them to you.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

BERRY, MARLE E. Age about twenty-seven, medium build, about five feet eight inches tall, fair complexion, black hair. Last heard of at Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Chicago, Ill., June 1919. Write to your old chum. Have knocked around Europe and the tropics since I last saw you.—Address GEORGE E. QUIGLEY, 67 "B" St., So. Boston, Mass.

KEARNS, GERTRUDE. Sister. Taken from Camdon Street Home, Boston, Mass., about 1904 or 1905 by a Norwegian family—name unknown. Any news of her whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address LEO KEARNS, 263 Summer St., Postal Telegraph Co., Boston, Mass.

GHOLSTON, CAPT. JABEZ GIDEON. Last heard from in Tampico, Mexico, January 1921. Over six feet, and weighs over two hundred pounds. Civil engineer. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JACK CAMPEN, Goldsboro, N. C.

SWEENEY, E. J. Please send your address to your uncle at Cumberland, Md.

FORD, HARRY. Husband. Let us hear from you. Return and we will do better. Baby well. I need you.—Address your wife MARIE, care of *Adventure*.

BAILEY, ROBERT. All is O.K. at home. No need for worry. Write for mother.—Address DICK BAILEY, care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SPOWAGE, JOHN. Father. Colliery boiler stoker. Left East Kirkby, Northinghamshire, England, for Canada—place unknown—about fifteen years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. GERTRUDE WARRENER, 135 Spring St., Springfield, Mass.

VANCE, JOHN RAYMOND. Brother. Last heard of in Bakersfield, Cal., November 1919. Age twenty-five. About five feet ten inches tall, slender build, weighs about 150 pounds. Brown hair, gray eyes, large ears; regular features. Veteran of World War, wounded in left leg below the knee at Château Thierry. Any information concerning him will be thankfully received.—Address EARL VANCE, Wiggins, Colorado.

KRAUSE, FRANK. Was with Pershing's Honor Guard Came home with them. Last heard of in Paterson; New Jersey. Your brother would like to hear from you.—LOUIS N. KRAUSE, 45-47 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

CROW, KATHERINE. (Maiden name) Lived in vicinity of Ishpeming and Iron Mountain, Michigan. Last heard from by letter from Iron Mountain about 1890. —Address nephew, J. H. care of Ross, 44 Seventh Avenue; New York, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BERGIN, BILL. Formerly of 127th F. A. Home in Blue Vale, Exeter, or McCool, Nebraska. Do you remember the buddy that was to see you in the Base Hospital and also made the trip to Bordeaux with you? Write. Important.—Address HOOKNOSE CURLY, care of *Adventure*.

SWANN, F. W. Brother. Last heard of about thirty years ago. Painter and farmer. Lived at Millsap, Texas, but later moved to Weatherford, Texas.—Address MRS. W. R. HARRIS, 316 W. Forest Avenue, East Point, Ga.

GARDNER, JOHN. Brother. Left Philadelphia, Pa., about ten years ago. Went to Cleveland, Ohio. Worked for a short time. Left farm and is believed to have gone to Canada. Plasterer by trade. About five feet eight inches, weighed about 165. Any information of his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JOSEPH GARDNER, 235 S. 62 Street, Philadelphia. Pa.

BASKET, ROBERT. Last heard of in Galveston, Texas. Lived on Avenue G. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write.—OTTO FAGOT, care of INTERSTATE ELEC. CO., New Orleans, La.

MELLARD, W. DONALD. I have some important mail and information regarding the positions you applied for before leaving. Am at same address. Please write.—RUSSELL.

ALLEN, GEORGE FOY. Left Henderson, Ky., about eight or nine years ago. Have important news for him. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to his niece. —Address MRS. H. P. CARSON (née Julia Stone) Corner Atlantic Ave., & 11th St., St. Petersburg, Fla.

MEMBERS of 2nd F. A. D. Batt. in Philippines and the Q. M. C. Vancouver, Wash. Please write.—Hampton J. Frazier Sr., Graton, Cal.

HAYDON, WILLIAM JACKSON. Age about thirty-nine, black hair, blue eyes, height about five feet nine inches. Left home in Oron Gate, Va. 1906. Believed to have gone to Suffolk, Va. Mother very ill. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address Charles A. Haydon, Sprague, W. Va.

RICHARDSON, HOWARD. Son. Tall, well built, weighs about 180 pounds, black hair and eyes. Discharged from 145th F. A. in 1919. Bugler. Any information will be deeply appreciated.—Address Mrs. Sarah Simo, Roosevelt, Utah.

RIDDLE, HARRY. BIG KERRIGAN or any of the boys who worked for Simm's Oil Co. Pipe Line Camp No. 2, Sibley, La. in December 1919. Any information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address Mike Wharton (Musician) U. S. S. *North Dakota*, care of Postmaster, New York.

FRANTZ, CHARLES E. Last heard of in navy aviation, San Diego, Cal. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mike Wharton (Musician) U. S. S. *North Dakota*, care of Postmaster, New York.

DELAMATER, FRANK C. Was a subdivider and dealer in Chicago real estate. Most active from 1890 to 1900. Last heard of in 1910. Any information will be appreciated.—Address R. Delamater, care of W. H. Brown, 855 Addison St., Chicago, Ill.

J. B. L. Letter and cards received. Please write particulars of your trouble. Your friends are willing to help you. Everybody well. Your brother came home safe. G. is in the army two years Located in Texas.—Address L. T. 428.

PAYNTEY, E. WARE. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write.—J. K. Christian, care of Bolden, 3744 Rokeby St., Chicago, Ill.

JONES, HARRY. Last heard of in Canada, 1914. Five feet ten inches tall, black hair and eyes. Gold bridge in upper teeth. Would be about forty-three years of age. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. Maud Jones, Philomath, Oregon.

BOYS of Co. M. 167th care of Rainbow Div. Oklahoma Reg. who knew Pvt. Billy Lambert, called "Red." Please write to his mother.—Address Mrs. Maud Jones, Philomath, Oregon.

CHRISTIAN, ELAM. Left home in Marietta, Ga., about eleven years ago. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—J. K. Christian, care of Bolden, 3744 Rokeby St., Chicago, Ill.

THE following have been inquired for in either the First September or Mid-September issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine.

BOROMAN, Lt. Clarence L.; Browne, Sanford; Clyde, Lewis; Curley; Edmonds, Jack; Franzen, Fritzoff F.; Gladden, William R.; Gunn, Corp. George; Hanson, Mrs. Annie; Harrison, Wm. G.; Hicks, Sydney; Hunt, Arthur; Hurley, Warner L.; Johnson, Ernest Lawrence; Jones, Melvin, Mur; Kaferle, Victor; Lane, Roy M.; Leef, Harry; Lockwood, Charles A.; McGovern, John; Mills, Charles Foster; Norton, Major Sam and Lt. Harold; Patton, Francis E.; Raley, Thomas Keys; Rinckhoff, J. Allen; Ruiz, Jose; Russell, Wm.; Ryan, Robert; Sage, F. L.; Sanford, Fay; Sattur, Peter A.; Shaffer, Edward; Sherp, Wilhelm; Skowronsky, John; Stewart, Ernest J.; Stoodley, Virginia; Summerell, W. E.; Taylor, Jimps; Valimont, William; Wagar, Frank or Fred; Walton, Theodore or Thad; Wells, Burtis E.; Wilkins, Francis B.; Young, Franklin Le Roy.

MISCELLANEOUS—Any of gang in A. C. No. 5 U. S. A. up to 1918; Little Son; 140th Inf. Members.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

OCTOBER 20TH ISSUE

IN ADDITION to the two complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following seven stories:

UNWEPT, UNHONORED AND UNHUNG — ***Frederick J. Jackson***
The bad-man against the bandits, Mex.

THE LIFE OF RILEY — ***Max Bonter***
That's what stoking the Great Lakes steamer was—almost.

GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT — ***Stanton C. Lapham***
But when you find it in Alaska you've got to fight to keep it.

THE PATHLESS TRAIL A Four-Part Story Part II — ***Arthur O. Friel***
Into the Brazilian jungle with the cannibals.

WEAVED BY WARNER — ***W. C. Tuttle***
Which is told by the worst—or the best—liar in Yaller Rock County.

N'GULULE — ***F. St. Mars***
The fastest beast in the jungle goes after food.

RUM ISLAND — ***Kenneth Howell***
Two men and a treasure.

GOLDWYN *presents*

The Old Nest

RUPERT HUGHES'

Heart-gripping story of Home

DIRECTED BY **REGINALD BARKER**

The mother whose children no longer seemed to want her

SUDDENLY they have all grown up and left her—the babies she used to tuck in bed at night. The old house is empty and silent. All have forgotten her. Her birthdays pass unnoticed.

Each child has embarked on a drama of his own. Loves, ambitions, temptations carry them away. The story of their lives sweeps you along.

Your life—your home—your mother. Never before has the screen touched with such beauty and such dramatic force a subject which finds an echo in the lives of every one of us. "The Old Nest" is a masterpiece of a new type—a presentation of life as it really is with its moments of great joy and flashes of exquisite pain. One of the most heart-gripping dramatic stories ever narrated.

A GOLDWYN PICTURE

To be followed by Rupert Hughes' "Dangerous Curve Ahead"

Watch your theatre announcements

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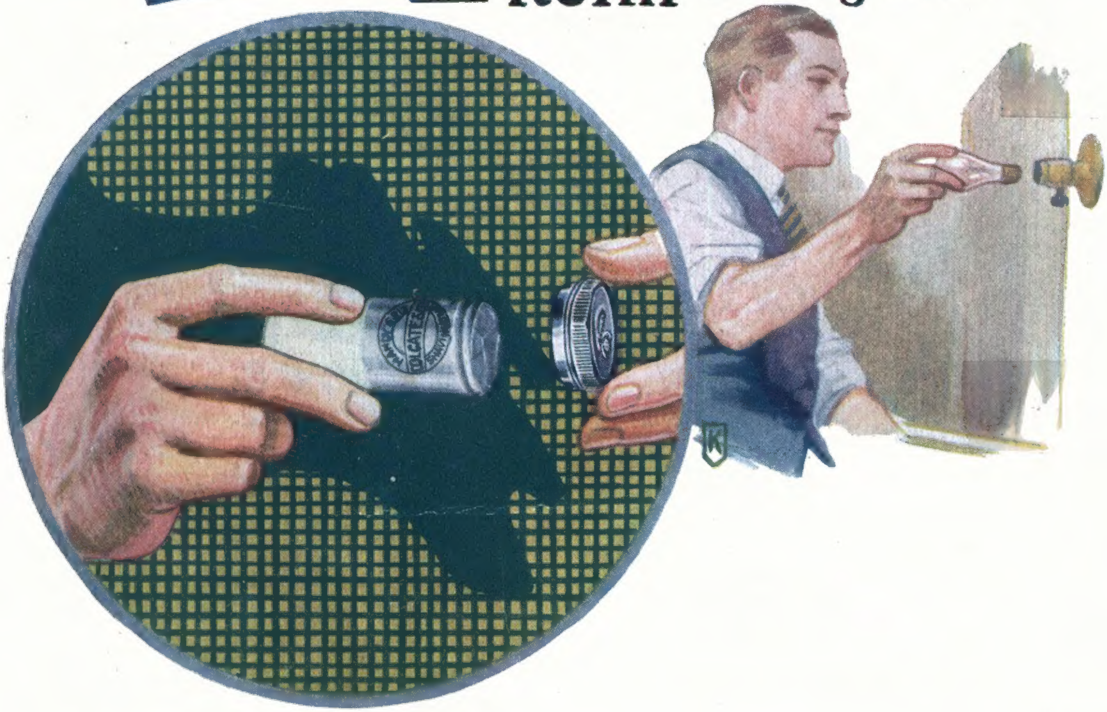
"HANDY GRIP" REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Refill Shaving Stick



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YOU need not buy a new "Handy Grip" with each stick of Colgate's Shaving Soap.

Buy "Refills" as you need them, for the price of the soap alone. The "Handy Grip" lasts for years.

One of the advantages of the Colgate "Refill" is that *the soap itself is threaded.* It screws into the "Handy Grip" firmly. Moisten the small stub unscrewed from the socket, and stick it upon the end of the "Refill." There is no waste.

Use Colgate's for *Shaving Comfort,* as well as for *Convenience* and *Economy.* It leaves the face cool and refreshed.

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Colgate's Shaving Stick not only produces the most soothing lather for the average man but it is a little more economical in use than powder, and much more economical than cream. As we make all three, we can give you this impartial advice.

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SHAVING STICK